

University of Memphis

## University of Memphis Digital Commons

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

4-29-2010

### Memory Jugs: Change and Continuity in a Traditional American Art Form

Jennifer Priscilla Hornby

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hornby, Jennifer Priscilla, "Memory Jugs: Change and Continuity in a Traditional American Art Form" (2010). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 31.  
<https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd/31>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by University of Memphis Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of Memphis Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [khggerty@memphis.edu](mailto:khggerty@memphis.edu).

To the University Council:

The Thesis Committee for Jennifer Priscilla Hornby certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis.

“Memory Jugs: Continuity and Change in a Traditional American Art Form”

---

Earnestine Jenkins, Ph.D.  
Major Professor

---

Richard Lou, MFA

---

Todd Richardson, Ph.D.

---

Carol Crown, Ph.D.

Accepted for the Council:

---

Karen D. Weddle-West, Ph.D.  
Vice Provost for Graduate Programs

## STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's degree at The University of Memphis, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgement of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this thesis may be granted by my major professor, or in her absence, by the Head of Interlibrary Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

MEMORY JUGS: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN A TRADITIONAL AMERICAN  
ART FORM

by

Jennifer Priscilla Hornby

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Major: Art History

The University of Memphis

May 2010

Copyright © 2010 Jennifer Priscilla Hornby  
All rights reserved

To my grandmother Rose for sparking my interest in art by everyday people and to my mother Priscilla for giving me the support I needed to make it this far. May the three Priscilla's continue to share enthusiasm for exceptional people, places and things

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my mentor and thesis advisor Dr. Earnestine Jenkins. Dr. Jenkins has been more than generous with her time and the hours she spent guiding me throughout the research process have proven invaluable to my thesis as well as my development as an art historian. I admire her dedication to the discipline and I have thoroughly enjoyed our common interest in African American art, culture, and history.

Many thanks to Dr. Carol Crown whose encouragement during the beginning stages of my memory jug research gave me confidence to continue the pursuit of knowledge. In addition, the opportunity Dr. Crown and her colleagues Lee Kogan and Cheryl Rivers afforded me at the Southeastern College Art Conference in 2009 led to many useful suggestions for developing my research. I am grateful to Dr. Todd Richardson for remaining open to my ideas and also for his recommendations during the preparation of my SECAC paper and the final stages of my thesis. Finally, I thank Richard Lou for showing an interest in my topic and taking the time to provide feedback from an artist's perspective.

Aside from my committee, there are other individuals from the University of Memphis who have supported my research in a number of ways. Among them, photography instructor David Horan who spent an entire afternoon photographing my memory jugs. Graduate MFA student Michael Darough, who allowed me to use one of his photographs in my thesis. Also my fellow colleagues, Elaine Slayton, Chantal Drake and Michelle Williams who not only provided me with feedback, but also friendship

throughout this challenging learning experience. Thank you for standing by my side, cheering me on, and making me feel like I was part of a team.

My thesis would not have been possible without the valuable information offered by contemporary memory jug artists Laurie Zuckerman, Karen Fischer, and Dixie Straight. Not only did they provide me with previously undocumented resource material but they continued to support my research over the last year by notifying me when coming across information that looked useful. I am grateful to Dr. Frank Nickell, Regional Historian from Southeast Missouri State University for offering his expertise and assisting me during the examination process of the 20<sup>th</sup> century memory jug from Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Finally, I would like to thank Willhelm Östberg, Curator of African Art at the Stockholm Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, Sweden who assisted me in navigating the museum's website so that I could access the digital archives and view their extensive collection of *minkisi*.



## ABSTRACT

Hornby, Jennifer Priscilla. MA. The University of Memphis. May/2010.  
Memory Jugs: Continuity and Change in a Traditional American Art Form. Major  
Professor: Dr. Earnestine Jenkins.

*Memory Jugs: Continuity and Change in a Traditional American Art Form*, examines the evolution of the memory jug practice in the United States from the late eighteenth-century to present day. I argue that Congo African ritual objects known as *minkisi* are responsible for the origin of the memory jug. Ways of thinking about and using objects that can be observed in *minkisi* are used to strengthen the previously established analogy between memory jugs and African American grave decoration.

The concept of memory is explored as it becomes increasingly influential to the memory jug practice in the twentieth-century. Four nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs are analyzed in comparison to oral interviews from three contemporary memory jugs artists. By considering the larger context of memory jugs before and after they were created strictly as commemorative objects for the deceased, memory jugs are better understood.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	ix
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Chapter	
1. ORIGIN OF THOUGHT: SPIRIT AND CONTAINMENT IN CONGO BELIEF. . .	10
1.1 Congo <i>History: Nkisi</i> .....	10
1.2 Congo <i>Religious Thought: Nkisi</i> .....	13
1.3 <i>The Spirit: Nkis</i> .....	15
1.4 <i>Diversity of Form, Flexibility of Function: Nkisi</i> .....	17
1.5 <i>Arrest of the Spirit: Containment and Nkisi</i> .....	19
2. CONGO SURVIVALS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH.....	23
2.1 <i>African American Culture: The Plantation</i> .....	23
2.2 <i>African American Culture: Containment</i> .....	27
2.3 <i>African American Culture: Gardens, Yards and Grave Decoration</i> .....	29
2.4 <i>African American Culture: The Memory Jug</i> .....	35
3. MEMORY JUGS: MODERN OBJECTS OF MEMORY AND HONOR.....	39
3.1 <i>Introduction</i> .....	39
3.2 <i>Memory, Motive and Aesthetics in the Art of Karen Fischer</i> .....	40
3.3 <i>Memory, Process and Symbolism in the Art of Laurie Zuckerman</i> .....	47
3.4 <i>Personal Memory in the Art of Dixie Straight</i> .....	57

3.5 <i>The Memory Jug Maker</i> .....	58
CONCLUSION.....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	65
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	68

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. <i>Nkisi</i> nyte, before 1919, Democratic Republic of the Congo. . . . .	68
2. Basundi, <i>Nkisi Nkukula</i> , before 1919, Belgian Congo. . . . .	69
3. Basundi, <i>Nkisi amulet</i> , before 1919, Belgian Congo . . . . .	70
4. <i>Nkisi NKondi</i> , late 19 <sup>th</sup> - early 20 <sup>th</sup> century, Democratic Republic of the Congo. . . .	71
5. BaKongo, <i>Nkisi Nkondi Mungundu</i> , before 1907, Zaire. . . . .	72
6. BaKongo, <i>Nkisi</i> and a detail of the <i>bilongo</i> inside, before 1892, Africa. . . . .	73
7. Detail, inside of an <i>nkisi</i> , before 1919, Africa. . . . .	74
8. BaKongo, <i>Nkisi Nkubulu</i> , before 1919, Zaire. . . . .	75
9. Photograph of a bottle tree, Arlington, TN, 2010. . . . .	76
10. Photograph of the Cornelius Lee yard show, Tidewater, Virginia, 1988 . . . . .	77
11. Photograph of Reverend George Kornegay's yard, 1997-1998, Bibb County, Alabama. . . . .	78
12. Photograph of a yard show, Austin, Texas, early 1990's. . . . .	79
13. E. J. Glaves, <i>A Congo Chieftain's Grave</i> , before 1891. . . . .	80
14. Photograph of grave decoration in an African American cemetery, 1933, Sea Islands, Georgia. . . . .	81
15. Photograph of grave decoration in an African American cemetery, 2009, Reverend W. H. Hammond Cemetery, Arlington, TN. . . . .	82
16. Artist unknown, <i>Object number two</i> , date unknown, Jackson, Tennessee. . . . .	83
17. Artist Unknown, <i>Memory Decanter with Red Wax and Indian Head Penny</i> , after 1904. . . . .	84
18. Artist unknown, <i>Memory jug with stopper</i> , date unknown. . . . .	85
19. Karen Fischer, <i>Overland Trail Jug</i> , 2006 . . . . .	86
20. Artist unknown, <i>Object number one</i> , before 1989, Jackson, Tennessee. . . . .	87

21. Karen Fischer, <i>Overland Trail Jug Preliminary Layout</i> . . . . .	88
22. Detail of <i>Object number two</i> , date unknown, Jackson, Tennessee. . . . .	89
23. Artist Unknown, <i>Object number three</i> , 1923-1989, Cape Girardeau, Missouri. . . . .	90
24. Detail of <i>Object number three</i> , 1923-1989, Cape Girardeau, Missouri. . . . .	91
25. Detail of <i>Object number three</i> , 1923-1989, Cape Girardeau, Missouri. . . . .	92
26. Detail of <i>Object number three</i> , 1923-1989, Cape Girardeau, Missouri. . . . .	93
27. Dixie Straight, <i>Memory jug</i> , 2009. . . . .	94
28. Artist unknown, <i>Object number four</i> , 1949-2008. . . . .	95
29. Artist unknown, Detail of <i>Object number four</i> , 1949-2008. . . . .	96

## INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Created by arranging a selection of small objects onto the surface of a vessel that is first covered in an adhesive, memory jugs could be described as a three-dimensional collage, with each piece inspiring reflection (Fig. 16). Those who are familiar with the research on memory jugs are aware that the scholarship on this topic is quite repetitive. There are very few resources available to individuals who wish to further their knowledge beyond the widely established theories of origin.<sup>1</sup>

John Michael Vlach and Robert Farris Thompson must be credited for their work on memory jugs as their suggestions for approaching the objects have now become the general consensus among scholars interested in African retentions and adaptations in American culture. Their research examines memory jugs specifically as they relate to African retentions in African American culture. Consequently, memory jugs have remained within the genre of African American funerary arts because of the striking similarities between the materials found on the jugs and the materials found on and around African burial sites. Broken pottery, seashells, glass, rocks, and to the uninformed viewer, “random objects,” have been documented at west and central African grave sites since the nineteenth-century. (Fig. 13) In an African context, personal items such as eating utensils are believed to be tied to the spirit of the deceased and by including them the spirit is made content.<sup>2</sup> Seashells and other white objects are associated with the

---

1. My introductory research on memory jugs was established in two research papers written under the direction of my committee member Dr. Carol Crown. The two papers draw attention to the visual similarities between African American gardens and yards, Lukasa memory boards and memory jugs.

2. John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 139-144; Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 163-164; Ernest Ingersoll, “Decoration of Negro Graves,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 5, no. 16 (Jan-Mar 1892): 142-143.

spiritual world and placed on the grave to encourage a complete and peaceful journey to the afterlife. Mirrors and glass are said to have protective powers both for the spirit and from the spirit's return.<sup>3</sup> Similar artifacts have been observed at African American burial sites in the South since the 1880's, making the connection between African American culture and memory jugs even more convincing (Fig. 14).<sup>4</sup>

Curator Brooke Davis Anderson made a significant contribution to the advances in memory jug research with the 1996 exhibition, *Forget-Me-Not: The Art & Mystery of Memory Jugs*, at the Diggs Gallery at Winton-Salem University. Today, the thirty-six page exhibition catalog is the most comprehensive reference available for individuals who wish to familiarize themselves with the subject. Robert Farris Thompson establishes the tone in the Foreword and from there Anderson and Linda Beatrice Brown expand on the topic to a point, stressing that more research is needed. The publication and circulation of this particular text has become the foundation as well as the stopping point for further research on memory jugs. Fourteen years later no advances have been made and the three established theories as to the original function of memory jugs remain unquestioned.

In an American context, the prevailing thought is that memory jugs served as a memorial in honor of a deceased loved one.<sup>5</sup> Similar to a scrapbook, they were created

---

3. Robert Farris Thompson, "Bighearted Power: Kongo Presence in the Landscape and Art of Black America," in Grey Gundaker, ed., *Keep Your Head to the Sky* (The University Press of Virginia, 1998), 58.

4. Henry Carrington Bolton, "Decoration of Negro Graves in South Carolina," 4, no. 14 (July-September 1891): 214, accessed 31 January 2010, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/534005>.

5. Brook Davis Anderson, *Forget Me Not: The Art and Mystery of Memory Jug* (Winston-Salem State University: Diggs Gallery, 1996), 7.

and then displayed in a special place inside of the home.<sup>6</sup> Scholars discuss how the detail oriented act of arranging objects that recall memories of the deceased could be therapeutic during the grieving process. It has also been suggested that memory jugs were used as memorials on graves. The same healing process applies but in this case the finished product was placed near the deceased as a symbol of honor. Finally, some scholars describe memory jugs as merely a hobby or a craft popularized during the Victorian era, often referred to as a rainy day activity.<sup>7</sup>

While I am confident that all three of the established theories have validity, there are empty gaps in the recorded history of these fascinating objects. Memory jug scholarship is centered on two stopping points in history; a period when the objects were created as commemorative objects for the deceased and a time when they were made for artistic pleasure. My thesis expands upon the existing theoretical models by investigating more closely the origin of the memory jug practice, and then suggesting additional ways of interpreting nineteenth-to twentieth-century memory jugs, resulting from the evolution of the practice.

My research is a closer examination of the traditional form of the memory jugs as a container or vessel associated with the material things and memories of the dead. Viewing memory jugs as objects with origins in the African past that were first adapted by African Americans, I approach the objects from a historical perspective, chronicling changes in form, function and aesthetics over time. My study treats nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs as modern art forms. While the majority of past

---

6. Anderson, *Forget Me Not*, 11.

7. Ibid., 7.



scholarship views them as relics from a former period, interviews with three contemporary memory jug artists support that memory jugs are still being made today and that the practice has continued to evolve. Ultimately, my collective research reveals that this particular method of creative expression is practiced by a broad range of artists for whom the objects still act as vessels that evoke spiritual influence related to but not limited to the dead.

### ***Chapters One and Two***

The methodology of Chapter One and Two is defined in Melville Herskovits's *Myth of the Negro Past* where he lays a foundation for examining African American cultural practices in relation to their African origins. Starting at the root, John S. Mbiti's research also establishes a general African world view. The work of more recent scholars John K. Thornton and Wyatt McGaffey is used to examine Congo religious thought and objects known as *minkisi*.<sup>8</sup> (Figs. 1, 2, 3) A classical Congo tradition, "*minkisi are [complex] ritual objects invested with otherworldly power, allowing them to affect both spiritual and material functions in the world.*"<sup>9</sup> MacGaffey's work constitutes the majority of scholarship on *minkisi* and the catalog published by the National Museum of African Art for the 1994 exhibition, *Astonishment and Power: Kongo Minkisi & The Art of Renée Stout* is especially resourceful for grasping the general history and concept of these spiritual objects. Primary sources consulted include *Seven Years Among the Fjort*,

---

8. Examining memory jugs and their potential relationship to *minkisi* was suggested by my thesis advisor Dr. Earnestine Jenkins after presenting my research on memory jugs at the Southeastern College Art Conference in 2009. The first discussions of this connection were centered on the recognized visual similarities between Object number two, (Figure 16) and *minkisi minkonde*, (Figure 4) and specifically, the figural shape of memory jug vessels.

9. Young, *Rituals*, 110; The practice of using charms, amulets or other medicines to achieve safety and protection can be observed in almost all African societies, John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* ( New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 201.

by British trader R.E. Denhet from 1887 and the translated text of Nsemi Isaki, a Congo man who collected research under Swedish ethnographer Karl Laman in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Isaki's description is the most comprehensive explanation of *minkisi* available today.

After a thorough dissection of *minkisi*, Chapter Two moves to the United States where African American cultural practices are examined in relation to African antecedents. While the range of Central African religious influences is complex, a considerable amount of scholarship has been generated from discussions of Congo retentions observed in grave decoration, the supernatural use of trees, and the use of charms in African American culture.<sup>10</sup> These ideas, first elaborated on by scholars like John W. Blassingame, Albert J. Raboteau, Jason R. Young, Grey Gundaker and Robert Farris Thompson, are expanded on in a comparison between the spiritual and creative practices of African Americans in the United States and Congo *minkisi*. Focusing on archeological findings at former plantation sights, African American gardens and yards, and African American grave decoration, the connections that can be drawn between these practices alone are remarkable.<sup>11</sup> Each makes use of appropriation by using readily available materials and assigning those materials new functions. The function of these tangible forms is usually related to spiritual concerns, typically protection of spirits or protection from spirits. The actual materials appropriated for use on African and African American graves, charms and yards include common objects like glass bottles, ceramic

---

10. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1983), 108.

11. The portion of my thesis that involves comparing memory jugs to African American gardens and yards was established under the direction of my committee member, Dr. Carol Crown.

pots, seashells, and objects that are the color white, each possessing associations with water which is frequently the land of the dead in some African-Congo belief systems.<sup>12</sup> Primary sources include information gathered from first hand accounts as well as Bolton, Ingersoll and Glave's discussions of grave decoration in the Congo and the American South from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

While past research has acknowledged the similarities between Congo grave decoration and memory jugs, scholars have yet to recognize the influence of Congo *minkisi* in early African American memory jugs. In *Flash of the Spirit*, Thompson goes so far as to state that African American graves demonstrate continuity of the Congo derived notion of the grave site as a type of charm, similar to an *nkisi* (singular *minkisi*).<sup>13</sup> Thompson is able to make a similar connection with bottle trees and African American yards by comparing them with Congo *minkisi* used to protect the home and Congo grave sites.<sup>14</sup> Recognized by scholars as a visual and conceptual component of *minkisi* and African and African American grave sites, "containment" is they key for strengthening previously made Congo connections and expanding on them to include memory jugs.<sup>15</sup> Containment of a spirit whether it be good or evil, ancestral or unknown, or containment of substances associated with the spiritual realm, is central to the form and function of *minkisi*. It has also been argued that the concept of containment is present in the early

---

12. Wyatt MacGaffey, "Oral Tradition in Central Africa," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, no. 3, (1974): 417.

13. Thompson, *Flash*, 132-142.

14. Thompson, *Flash*, 142-145; Robert Farris Thompson, "A Song That Named the Land," in Robert V. Rozelle, et al., eds., *Black Art-Ancestral Legacy* (Dallas: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), 124-135.

15. Wyatt MacGaffey recognized the concept of "containment" in *minkisi*. For further reading see Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2000), 82.

forms of African American creative and spiritual expressions mentioned above. Chapter Two will emphasize the similarities in materials used, the process of appropriation, beliefs about spirit, and the concept of containment as important components of *minkisi*, African American yards and grave decoration, bottle trees and memory jugs. In making these connections the pattern of thought that serves as the foundation of the memory jug practice in America becomes strikingly clear.

### ***Chapter Three***

In Chapter Three, the evolution of the memory jug practice in the United States established in Chapters One and Two is further explored by looking at how memory becomes increasingly influential to the memory jug practice during the nineteenth-century to present-day. The chapter begins by suggesting that the concept of memory is a modern function of objects formerly known as “spirit jars,” “what-not jugs,” and “whimsy jars,” to name a few. The methodology relies on comparing oral interviews with contemporary memory jug artists to in-depth examinations of four nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs.

One of the most significant limitations in memory jugs scholarship is that scholars have traditionally abandoned the subject after highlighting a period of time when the objects were made in honor of an individual recently deceased. Linking memory jugs to nineteenth-and turn-of-the-century funerary rituals and practices in the South has unfortunately locked our understanding of the objects in time and place. The limitation so embedded in the scholarship has placed restrictions on interpretive possibilities that can illuminate how memory jugs have continued to evolve, while retaining characteristics of their original symbolism and function. Analyzing the work and interviews of three

contemporary memory jug artists supports my thesis that memory jugs continue to be made and require scholarly attention beyond the traditional approach that views them mainly as commemorative objects for the deceased.<sup>16</sup>

Psychoanalytical iconographic approaches are a widely neglected aspect of contemporary memory jug research. Artists and date are unknown for most memory jugs made during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century. While general date ranges have been established for a number of the objects analyzed in this thesis, it is a nearly impossible task to uncover the names of the creators. In spite of identity gaps in reference to the artist, I suggest that a psychological analysis can be achieved by comparing the nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs to the aesthetic and functional goals of the three contemporary memory jug artists, strengthened by examining the artists' personality and vision.

For example, a comparison between an eighteenth- to nineteenth-century memory jug and the artwork of Karen Fischer highlights the diverse role that memory plays in the function of the objects and suggests additional ways of interpreting memory jugs. An analysis of two additional memory jugs and the techniques used by contemporary artist Laurie Zuckerman calls attention to the memory jug process and indicates that the objects are created with intention and the use of symbolism. An exploration of the work of Dixie Straight reveals that memory jugs are highly personal, individualized objects that even when made in honor of a deceased person, are ultimately more about the maker's own

---

16. Chapter Three is longer version of the paper I presented at the Southeastern College Art Conference in 2009. Dr. Carol Crown and Lee Kogan chaired the session panel. Other committee members assisted me in developing methods of approaching memory jugs that I used in this chapter. My thesis advisor Dr. Earnestine Jenkins suggested that I further develop the research I completed under Dr. Crown by conducting detailed formal analyses of actual memory jugs. She also suggested that I interview contemporary memory jug artists. Dr. Todd Richardson recommended I develop my research further by studying the role of memory in visual arts and also considering why memory jugs are created on jugs, jars, or other vessels.

experiences with that individual. Closing with a discussion about the memory jug maker, an additional comparison between the artists' personalities and artistic vision and a twentieth-century memory jug proposes that the memory jug maker is a collector and an artist. Drawing attention to similarities in process, intent, aesthetics and function, the comparisons offered in Chapter Three expand on existing memory jug scholarship by suggesting new ways of looking and thinking about nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs.

## CHAPTER 1

### ORIGIN OF THOUGHT: SPIRIT AND CONTAINMENT IN CONGO BELIEF

#### *Congo History: Nkisi*

It is generally agreed among scholars that Central African cultures are among the most influential cultures introduced into the New World. Congo Africans account for nearly 45 percent of all enslaved Africans brought to the Western Hemisphere during the Atlantic Slave Trade. An even higher percentage of Congo Africans were transplanted to the southern part of the United States after 1808 through illegal slave-trading pursuits such as the infamous *Wanderer*, owned and operated by Charles Lamar up until the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> It is no surprise then that Congo religion is regarded as one of the most significant influences on American Southern culture.<sup>2</sup> A synopsis of the history of *minkisi* in the Congo demonstrates the remarkable resilience of the objects and also the degree in which *minkisi* are embedded into Congo culture.

Portuguese explorers first arrived in West Central Africa during the fifteenth-century initiating the long process of trade, exchange and colonization. At the time of their arrival, a complex religious system that involved the use of *minkisi* was well established in the Congo.<sup>3</sup> Over the next five hundred years, Bantu speakers referred to as BaKongo were subjected to strong efforts of conversion by European missionaries.

---

1. Anand Prahlad, ed., *Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Folklore* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 755; Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 34.

2. Prahlad, ed., *Greenwood*, 755.

3. Wyatt MacGaffey is the leading scholar on Congo religion and the role of *minkisi* in Congo culture. His work constitutes the majority of scholarship available on this topic, Wyatt MacGaffey, "The Eyes of Understanding Kongo Minkisi," in Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 29.

Early accounts of *minkisi* in practice are told through the eyes of explorers and missionaries of this kind.<sup>4</sup>

The Kingdom of Kongo emerged as a powerful state in the sixteenth- and seventeen-century. Regardless of the inner changes that occurred as a result of religious power wars and the expanding Atlantic slave trade, the ritual objects maintained an astonishing resilience.<sup>5</sup> During the eighteenth-century and much of the nineteenth-century, the Congo experienced a decline in Christianity; likewise first hand accounts of *minkisi* in European accounts are limited during this era. It was not until 1870 when missionaries began to arrive again that documentation of *minkisi* resumed in European reports.<sup>6</sup> While the slave trade decreased in the late nineteenth-century, the trade in “exotica” and “curiosities” from Africa increased and *minkisi minkonde* figures (Fig. 4) became part of ethnographic collections in newly founded museums and other cultural restitutions throughout the West.<sup>7</sup>

---

4. Capuchin missionary, Father Capelle observed in 1643 that *minkisi* took diverse forms when he recorded that, “they keep them on their person, or suspend them in their homes...others wear bracelets with which the fetishes transmit their magical *forces*,” Young, *Rituals*, 110; Early descriptions of *minkisi* are also found in Dutch geographer Olfert Dapper’s *Description de l’Afrique*, published in 1686. Dapper describes *minkisi* by writing that, “These Ethiopians[BaKongo] call moquise [*minkisi*] everything in which resides, in their opinion, a secret and incomprehensible virtue to do them good or evil and to reveal events past and future.” Originally published in Dutch, this book has been translated in various European languages, Sylvia H. Williams, “Fragments of History,” in Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power* (Washington D.C.: The Smithsonian Press, 1993), 13.

5. For a short history of the Kongo Kingdom and its collapse in the 17<sup>th</sup> century see, John K. Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641-1718* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 56-68; Williams, “Fragments,” 12.

6. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 30-33; British trader R.E. Dennett wrote about *minkisi minkonde* in 1887. Dennett describes figures with nails driven into them by saying, “upon payment of a certain sum to the doctor or nganga, [the] petitioner’s request to be saved from evil being considered as heard and certain of accomplishment as soon as the nail is being driven in,” R. E. Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort: being an English Trader’s Experiences in the Congo District* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1887), 62.

7. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 31-32.



At the turn of the twentieth-century, European colonizers, collectors and traders recorded that despite centuries of mass destruction of *minkisi*, the objects were still being used and regarded as highly effective tools of resistance by BaKongo peoples.<sup>8</sup> Around 1920, a group of Congo men conducted research under Swedish missionary ethnographer, Karl Edward Laman for a project aimed at documenting the rapidly changing Congo culture that had survived under Belgian rule for several decades. The text written by Nsemi Isaki is among the most thorough and useful descriptions of *minkisi* available. The collective research reveals that despite three hundred years of colonization efforts, the meaning of the word *nkisi* remained constant from the earliest seventeenth-century accounts up until the twentieth-century.<sup>9</sup> In addition, some of the ritual objects described in Ofert Dapper's *Description de l'Afrique*, in 1686 remained active well into the twentieth-century.<sup>10</sup>

In more recent years, evidence of *minkisi* in practice is still being observed in Congo Africa. During the major religious movement led by Simon Kimbangu in the 1950's in which the Congo eventually gained its independence from Belgium, supporters of the mission confirmed that *minkisi* were still in use.<sup>11</sup> Wyatt MacGaffey states that, "Minkisi today, in what has become the Republic of Zaire, take such forms as little

---

8. In 1902, an American missionary writing home described that, "a fetish itself may be an image decorated with strips of clothe and feathers, often with a bit of mirror set into the belly, behind which is a bit of rubbish containing potent powder, often a small sack made of pineapple fiber containing bits of stone, bird claws and feathers," MacGaffey, "Eyes of Understanding," 33, 42.

9. Williams, "Fragments," 12-13; MacGaffey, "Eyes of Understanding...", 62-68; Nsemi Isaki's full text is translated in English in John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire* (Lawrence, Kans: University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology, 1974.), 31-41.

10. MacGaffey, "Eyes of Understanding," 30.

11. Ibid., 29.

plastic packets discreetly worn, ballpoint pens medicated to help schoolboys pass their exams, and special sunglasses that taxi drivers hope will protect them from accidents.”<sup>12</sup>

### ***Congo Religious Thought: Nkisi***

*Minkisi* are among the most influential charms in all of Africa.<sup>13</sup> Used to treat a variety of both personal and public “illnesses,” their complexity in concept is matched by their complexity in form. The term “illnesses” does not have the same meaning in English; rather “illnesses” in Bantu language refer to an endless list of trials including disease, misfortune, lack of protection or luck, even poor academic performance.<sup>14</sup> *Minkisi* and the “illnesses” they treat take two forms: “of the above,” and “of the below.”<sup>15</sup> “Of the above” are associated with sky, fire, violence and masculinity and they both inflict and heal “illnesses” of the upper body. *Minkisi* “of the below,” are associated with the earth, water, healing and femininity and they inflict and heal “illnesses” of the lower body.<sup>16</sup>

Most commonly constructed out of clay pots, *minkisi* are also made out of glass bottles, cloth bundles, gourds, shells, animal horns, and wooden statues (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4,

---

12. Many African societies create and use some type of religious object, John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Heinemann Educational Publishers: Johannesburg, South African, 1991), 144-146; MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 29.

13. Jeffrey E. Anderson, *Conjure in African American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.), 38.

14. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 62. Albert J. Robeteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 82.

15. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 69.

16. Wyatt MacGaffey, *The Personhood of Ritual Objects; Kongo minkisi* (Amsterdam: Etnofoor, 1990), 50; MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 69, 71.

and 5).<sup>17</sup> A ritual expert called an *nganga* is hired and paid for selecting the container and then filling it with the proper medicines (*bilongo*) required for the matter at hand.<sup>18</sup> Individuals consult an *nganga* for major issues that require a complex *nkisi* and for more common concerns one may create an *nkisi* for himself.<sup>19</sup>

A detailed description of the ideas and materials that make up these complex objects reveals three significant things. First, *minkisi* possess *spirit*. That spirit is represented by objects appropriated to symbolize souls from the land of the dead, materials from living or recently dead humans, and also by the visual representation of containment. Second, the concept of *containment* is fundamental to the visual presentation and power of *minkisi*. Containment of the spirit is represented in a number of ways that include sealing the container that holds the medicines (*bilongo*), or displaying excessive tying, binding and knotting on the outside of *minkisi*. Last, *minkisi* do not have a fixed form or a definite purpose, rather the diversity in form and flexibility in function is a quality that ultimately defines the objects. This significant characteristic applies to both the outside container and the medicines (*bilongo*) inside.

---

17. MacGaffey, "Eyes of Understanding," 67-68; The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography houses a large collection of *minkisi*. The collection can be viewed at "Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlingar," (National Museum of World Culture, 2010), accessed 12 Feb 2010, available at <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi," Internet. The Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum also houses a large collection of *minkisi* that can be viewed at, "Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlingar," (National Museum of World Culture, 2010), accessed 12 Feb 2010, available at <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/vkm/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi," Internet.

18. Most African cultures have an individual similar to an *nganga*, that plays the role of medicine man, Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 166-176; Nsemi Isaki's describes who makes *nkisi* and for what purpose, Nsemi Isaki's translated text in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 37; John K. Thornton describes the role of the *nganga* and they he was paid for his services, Thornton, *Kingdom*, 60-64; For a good description of *Nganga* see, E.J. Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," *The Century; A popular quarterly*, 0041 Issue 6 (April 1891): 825-837, accessed 8 January 2010, available at <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cent;cc=cent;view=toc;subview=short;idno=cent0041-6>.

19. Isaki's text translated in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 37.

### *The Spirit: Nkisi*

Similar to Christianity, Congo religion views the human body as the container of a soul that never dies. When the spirit leaves, the body is considered dead. Where the two religions differ is that in Congo thought, when the spirit leaves the body (the original container) it can inhabit any type of secondary container be it a bottle, shell, grave, wooden statue, bag or even another human body.<sup>20</sup> Building on this idea, spirits that inhabit living bodies are also in a state available for transference.<sup>21</sup> These spirits can exchange places with spirits in other living bodies while at the same time inhabit secondary containers.<sup>22</sup> The most important idea to take from this is that in Congo thought, all things living or once living, possess a spiritual force. That force can be harnessed and activated by inanimate objects. *Minkisi* play a major role in this belief system and are composed in the same way.<sup>23</sup>

The medicines (*bilongo*) inside *minkisi* are organized into two classes: “spirit-embodiment” and “spirit-directing.”<sup>24</sup> (Fig. 6) “Spirit embodying” materials take two

---

20. MacGaffey, *Personhood*, 49.

21. Ibid., 49.

22. MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power: The Visual Vocabulary of Kongo Minkisi,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 2 (Jan. 1988): 191.

23. MacGaffey, *Personhood*, 49; A majority of African cultures believe that spiritual forces can be accessed by certain individuals and used for both good and evil purposes, Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 19.

24. Maude Wahlman coined the terms “spirit-embodiment,” and “spirit-directing.” These terms work effectively to describe the materials inside *minkisi*. “Spirit-embodiment” refers to those objects believed to possess the spiritual force. “Spirit-directing,” refers to those objects that are used to tell the spirit what to do, Maude Southwell Wahlman, “African Charm Traditions,” in Charles Russell, ed., *Self Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (Jackson, Miss: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 150.

forms. One is *mpemba*, the most universal ingredient in all *minkisi*. The word “*mpemba*” is derived from the Congo view of the world as being two mountains opposed at their bases and separated by a body of water. Earth, the mountain on the top, is the land of the living. *Mpemba* is the mountain on the bottom, referred to as the land of the dead.<sup>25</sup> The word “*mpemba*” means “white,” or “chalk,” and refers to the color of the dead.<sup>26</sup> The water in between the land of the living and *mpemba* acts as both a barrier and a passage-way between the two worlds.<sup>27</sup> Inside *minkisi*, *mpemba* is typically represented by white chalk or white clay, sometimes referred to as “kaolin.” Occasionally white seashells or white rocks are appropriated as symbols of the land of the dead because of their color and association with water.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, in the nineteenth-century, European traders introduce mirrors into the Congo. The BaKongo associated mirrors with water because of their reflective quality and began using them on the inside and outside of *minkisi* to signify the land of the dead.<sup>29</sup> *Mpemba* in its most simple form represents the spiritual world of the dead as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

---

25. Fukiau kia Bunseki’s text, translated to English in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 34.

26. Wyatt MacGaffey, “Oral Tradition in Central Africa,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7 no. 3. (1974): 418.

27. Fukiau kia Bunseki’s text, translated to English in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 34.

28. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 62.

29. This practice can be observed most in *nkisi nkondi*, also known as nail figures, Young, *Rituals* 167.

30. *Mpemba* is the equivalent to the *Long dead* (*ghosts*) in the general African belief system. The long dead are those who are no longer remembered in their human form. They are considered strangers and because of that, they are generally feared the most, Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 70, 77.

On a more personal level, a second “spirit-embodiment” material is included inside of an *nkisi* to suggest the presence of a *specific* spirit, that of an individual who is either still alive or recently dead.<sup>31</sup> It is a widespread African belief that the “living dead” are spirits who passed away within the last five generations and are still remembered in human form by one or more family members. The spirits of the recently dead are considered the most powerful and the most accessible link to the spiritual world.<sup>32</sup> These second, “spirit embodying” materials include grave yard dirt, personal possessions or a fragment of clothing, nail or hair from a relative or other person either alive or recently dead.<sup>33</sup> They insert the spirit of that person who possesses the abilities needed for the power assigned to the *nkisi*.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Diversity of Form, Flexibility of Function: Nkisi***

“Spirit directing” materials also referred to as “metaphoric elements,” are included inside of an *nkisi* to instruct and confirm with the spirit the actions it will perform and the power assigned to the *nkisi*.<sup>35</sup> The flexibility in form and its related function is central to this component of *minkisi* and considered necessary to assure an air

---

31. McGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 191-192.

32. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 77-78; Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 82-83, 85.

33. MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 192.

34. Ibid., For example, if an *nkisi* is made to heal disease in a specific person, *mpemba* and perhaps a fragment of the person’s shirt may be included in the *nkisi*. On the other hand, if an *nkisi* is made to give someone luck, *mpemba* and the grave yard dirt of a well known lucky man may be included in the *nkisi*.

35. Wyatt MacGaffey coined the term “metaphoric elements,” and it refers to the use of metaphor when an individual or *nganga* assigns an atypical function to a particular object, MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 192-194.

of mystery around the object. Increasingly complex, “spirit-directing” objects are also organized into two classes: “verbal” and “visual.”<sup>36</sup>

“Verbal” elements use punning to link symbolic objects to the actions the spirit will take.<sup>37</sup> For example, a grain known as *luziba* may be included “to spiritually open up an affair” (*zibula*)<sup>38</sup> Charcoal, translated as *kalazima* may be included “to strike or extinguish” (*zima*).<sup>39</sup> A snail shell (*kodya*) may be included to evoke the verb (*kola*) “meaning to be strong.”<sup>40</sup> These visual, spirit-directing elements are chosen only for their linguistic properties, not their medicinal uses.<sup>41</sup>

“Visual” elements declare the type of power invested in the *nkisi*. As Wyatt McGaffey states, “[They] are specific to the kind of function the *nkisi* performs.” Appropriated materials may be animal, vegetable or mineral. Color also has specific connotations.<sup>42</sup> Visual metaphoric elements are used in practice like this: the head of a viper may be placed inside an *nkisi* that attacks wrongdoers.<sup>43</sup> At the same time a feather

---

36. MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 192-194; Robert Farris Thompson, “A Song That Named the Land,” in Robert V. Rozelle, et al., eds., *Black Art-Ancestral Legacy* (Dallas: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), 101.

37. MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 192.

38. Thompson, “Song That Named,” 101; For a more complete list see, Nsemi Isaki’s translated text in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 36.

39. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 62.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 193.

43. Ibid.

may be placed inside an *nkisi* to suggest “flight,” for an *nkisi* also meant to search out wrongdoers.<sup>44</sup> (Fig. 7)

Visual elements and verbal elements can overlap, allowing “spirit-directing materials” to possess multiple interpretations.<sup>45</sup> For example, verbally, a snail shell (*kodya*) evokes a verb meaning “to be strong,” (*kola*). Visually, the spiral inside the shell may also represent “long life.”<sup>46</sup> “Spirit-embodiment” materials and “spirit directing” materials also overlap. For example, the white color of the snail shell may also allude to *mpemba*, the land of the dead. One could continue in this way for some time but it quickly becomes clear that a standard list of materials and their respectively assigned attributes does not exist in practice.<sup>47</sup> The most important characteristic of all materials inside *minkisi* is that they possess flexibility, making them open to multiple interpretations that can only be confirmed by the creator. This trait suggests that *minkisi* are multivalent and personal and creates an air of mystery around the objects.

### ***Arrest of the Spirit: Containment and Nkisi***

The final element, vital in grasping the concept of *minkisi* is containment. In basic terms *minkisi* are containers for the spirits that empower them.<sup>48</sup> Without the spirit,

---

44. Young, *Rituals*, 113.

45. Ibid.

46. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 62. For a more complete list see, Nsemi Isaki’s translated text in Janzen and MacGaffey, *Anthology of Kongo Religion*, 36.

47. MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 194.

48. MacGaffey, “Eyes of Understanding,” 43.



the object is considered empty or dead.<sup>49</sup> Figurative *minkisi minkonde* (Figure 4) have received more attention than non-figurative *minkisi*, however their overrepresentation in museums and books is misleading.<sup>50</sup> In reality, clay pots and raffia bags are among the most common containers for the medicines (*bilongo*) (Figs. 1, 2).<sup>51</sup> Other objects appropriated for use as containers include bottles, both glass and ceramic, animal horns and snail shells.<sup>52</sup>

The power of an *nkisi* is equal to the power of the spirits contained within. In order to convey a message that powerful spiritual forces are under control within *minkisi*, visual techniques are used to emphasize the containment of these spirits.<sup>53</sup> These techniques include sealing the lids of bottles and pots, wrapping and tying excessive pieces of cord or fabric around the outside container and creating elaborate systems of knots surrounding or hanging from the outside container.<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 8) These exaggerated

---

49. MacGaffey, "Complexity, Astonishment and Power," 192.

50. MacGaffey, "Eyes of Understanding," 63. Recall that in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century, European traders purposefully sought out figural *nkisi nkonde*. For further reading on *nkisi nkonde*, see Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2000), 98-100.

51. MacGaffey, "Eyes of Understanding," 67-68. This statement is confirmed by viewing the large collection of *minkisi* housed at The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, "Databasen för museisamlinger," available at <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi," and at The Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum, "Databasen för museisamlinger" available at <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/vkm/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi."

52. Ibid.

53. Young, *Rituals*, 112.

54. Ibid., These techniques can be observed in *minkisi* at The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, "Databasen för museisamlinger," available from <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi," and at The Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum, "Databasen för museisamlinger" available from <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/vkm/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi."

visual signifiers of containment serve to validate the power of the nkisi and suggest the force of the spirits within.

Related to the concept of containment is the idea of “astonishment.” Elaborate arrangements of knots and tying and binding of fabric on the outside container are also used to demonstrate that the object is extraordinary. This visual characteristic adds to an nkisi’s mysteriousness, elicits awe, and generates a reputation of power in viewers.<sup>55</sup> Inside *minkisi*, pieces of quartz, rare insects, twisted roots and knots may be included to serve no other purpose but to enhance the object’s sacredness and visual power.<sup>56</sup>

A thorough dissection of the fundamental structures of *minkisi* is necessary for recognizing useful similarities between them and African American material culture. In Chapter Two, a story of Congo religious thought in the Americas unfolds by linking the influential ideas practiced in *minkisi* to former slave quarters in Texas, bottle trees in Virginia, African American yards in Alabama, grave decoration in South Carolina and memory jugs in Tennessee. The discussion of conjure practices in the United States serves as evidence that Congo religious thought, manifested in *minkisi*-like forms, survived in the New World. Bottle trees and African American gardens and yards are examined to establish the extremely influential concept of containment which in America evolves into the practice of viewing containers as spiritually powerful objects.

Like *minkisi*, each of these practices makes use of the process of appropriation, each is in someway involved with the spiritual realm or traditionally accepted “spirit-evoking” materials, and each practice recognizes and visualizes the concept of

---

55. Young, *Rituals*, 112.

56. MacGaffey, “Complexity, Astonishment and Power,” 196.

containment.<sup>57</sup> While these connections are most important, I will address similarities in ways of thinking about material objects that echo “astonishment” and “spirit-directing” materials as well. My research perspective also incorporates the diversity in form of Congo *minkisi* and the flexibility in function of *bilongo*.

In the process of discussing these similarities, a significant evolution in pattern of thought materializes. This change is characterized by a shift away from using material objects to direct spirits to provide protection, luck and health to instead using the same objects to honor and commemorate spirits to ensure their guidance, blessings and good fortune. The discussion of African and African American grave decoration provides the source of this practice and serves as a vital historical and cultural connection between traditional *minkisi*-like objects and their relationship to objects associated with spirits of the recently deceased. These significant breakthroughs not only shed light on the origin of the memory jug practice but also suggest more diverse ways of approaching the complex topic of early African American expressive culture and visual arts, including memory jugs.

---

57. The term “appropriation” is used to refer to the act of taking readily available or previously discarded material, and assigning that material a new meaning and/or function.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONGO SURVIVALS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

#### *African American Culture: The Plantation*

Christianity was the most common religion practiced by enslaved Africans and African Americans in the southern United States. However the acceptance of Christianity was a long, complex process marked by acculturation and it was typical for slave communities to possess underground spiritual practices stemming from an African belief in supernatural powers.<sup>1</sup> The majority of slaves lived separately from the white master class and continued to be influenced by their African and African American peers.<sup>2</sup> African American archaeology has been ground-breaking in its scientific and scholarly attempts to reveal the interior, spiritual lives of slaves. Today, written accounts of separate, African American cultural practices are now being supported with archaeological evidence from former plantation sites. Most important to this thesis is how this combined information points to Congo patterns of thought and practice in some early African American cultures.

In the Congo, a successful *nganga* enjoyed an elevated position in the community as he was both feared and greatly respected.<sup>3</sup> He adopted mysterious personas, often

---

1. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 7; For further reading see, Melville Herskovits, *Myth of the Negro Past*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.) 200-237; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 55; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 288.

2. Levine, *Black Culture Black Consciousness*, 139.

3. E. J. Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," *The Century; A popular quarterly* 0041Issue 6 (April 1891):825-837, accessed 29 January 2010, available at <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/textidx?c=cent;cc=cent;view=toc;subview=short;idno=cent0041-6>, 826.

separating himself from the community, and interacting with others only on terms of business.<sup>4</sup> The *nganga* made his livelihood by creating and instructing *minkisi* for the benefit of individuals and the community.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1980's at the former Jordan Plantation in Houston, Texas, a collection of objects including seashells, beads, bases of cooking pots, doll parts, nails, pieces of much-used chalk, bottles and samples of medicine were uncovered in a building thought to be previously occupied by a slave healer.<sup>6</sup> In the United States, the role of the *nganga* was recreated in "root doctors" or "conjure men."<sup>7</sup> Written documentation reveals that conjure men too, were able to achieve elevated positions in their local societies even on the plantation. A conjure man charged money for his services and if he proved his powers effectively, he earned respect from other slaves and instilled fear, even in his master.<sup>8</sup> Like an *nganga*, a conjure man during and post antebellum periods was typically a mysterious character or an outcast in the community.<sup>9</sup> A first hand account of

---

4. Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," 829.

5. John K. Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition 1641-1718* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 60-62.

6. Theresa A. Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slave Life," in Edward D.C. Campbell and Kym S. Rice, eds., *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*, (Richmond, Virginia: Museum of the Confederacy, 1991), 164.

7. Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 127. Women were also important spiritual leaders.

8. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 280; Anderson, *Conjure*, 86-87; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 113.

9. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 276; Stories of conjure men seen as respected yet feared individuals are common. A characteristic example is a slave narrative, Rias Body, Interview by J.R. Jones, 24 July 1936, Works Project Administration, First Series, Library of Congress Rare Book Room Collection, Georgia Narratives, Vol. 12A, 86, in *American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography* database, accessed 25 January 2010, available at [http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn\\_12\\_bod\\_r.pdf](http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn_12_bod_r.pdf).

a slave conjure man referred to as “one-eyed ugly Dinkie,” reveals that he was feared by everyone and because of that, Dinkie, “never worked, never received a flogging, and was never stopped by patrollers.”<sup>10</sup>

In the United States, *minkisi*-like objects took names such as “conjure bag,” “hand,” “jack,” “charm,” and “juju bag,” to name a few.<sup>11</sup> Similar to *minkisi*, these charms were created to treat a variety of local concerns including, health, luck, protection, revenge and even love.<sup>12</sup> They were often buried in the ground or worn on the person, recalling traditional Congo methods of calling the *nkisi* into action.<sup>13</sup>

Conjure men consciously concerned themselves with the visual representation of containment as “medicines” were typically wrapped in cloth bundles or sealed inside glass bottles. A student attending the Hampton Institute in 1899 recalled techniques used by conjure men to represent containment and evoke astonishment that involved putting live salamanders inside bottle charms. She stated, “These medicine bottles, often called ‘walking boys’, typically featured string tied tightly about the neck. The bottles are generally dark in color, that one may not see what the doctor puts in it-something alive, you may know, which enables it to move or even flutter briskly-this makes you certain of whatever the fact the doctor is trying to impress.”<sup>14</sup>

---

10. Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 113.

11. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Indivisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 277; Even when slaves claimed that they did not believe in conjure, many still carried luck charms, Levine, *Black Culture Black Consciousness*, 30.

12. Young, *Rituals*, 119.

13. Even after an *nkisi* was created, an individual or *nganga* had to call it into action. This was often done by burying the *nkisi* or in the case of *nkisi nkondi*, driving a nail into the figure, Ibid., 115.

14. Young, *Rituals*, 121.

Objects found in African American charms evoke *bilongo* as they share similarities with “spirit embodying,” and “spirit directing,” materials. One of the most common ingredients was graveyard dirt or “goofer dust.”<sup>15</sup> This “spirit embodying” material also used in Congo *minkisi* was regarded as a powerful component to any charm in America.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, a story told by a former slave from Indiana reveals that a conjure man used a piece of clothing from a specific individual to create a charm that would in turn cast a spell on that individual directly.<sup>17</sup> This method calls to mind the Congo belief that the spirit of a living person can embody secondary, inanimate objects and through use of those objects one can affect the spirit of the living with *minkisi*. Other ingredients inside African American charms such as nails, blades, pins and needles evoke “spirit-directing” materials. These specific objects recall *minkisi minkondi* and also suggest visual puns of *cutting* the pains or *burying* an issue.<sup>18</sup>

Aside from representing Congo religious thought on American soil, the objects inside charms represent outstanding examples of how African Americans appropriated mass produced and a diversity of other objects to create a separate African American meaning. Archaeological evidence and first hand accounts reveal that the majority of material objects owned by slaves were hand-me-downs making small, personal

---

15. Young, *Rituals*, 124.

16. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 278.

17. Lark Jones, interview by Anna Pritchett, 1 December 1937, “Hoodoo Doctor,” Federal Writer’s Project, First Supplemental Series, Indiana Narratives, vol 05S, 86, in *American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography* accessed 25 January 2010, available at [http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn\\_05s\\_hoo.pdf](http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn_05s_hoo.pdf).

18. The BaKongo sometimes referred to the act of nailing an *nkisi nkondi* figure as “burying” an issue in the body of the figure. Other visual puns with similar allusions have been observed in the United States, for example, a hoe or an ax place under a bed to cut labor pains, Young, *Rituals*, 115, 123; A folk practice observed in Mississippi involved striking the air with an ax to “cut” or “chase away” a storm, Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 81.

belongings highly valued.<sup>19</sup> Buttons from old clothing, recycled and used to make quilts are found in abundance at former slave dwellings. In Memphis, a collection of small, colorful, ceramic fragments collected from chicken gizzards was unearthed at the site of former slave cabins on the Hildebrand plantation.<sup>20</sup> These are the types of material goods that slaves had access to and as a result, these are the kinds of objects slaves collected and appropriated for use in their charms. In 1996 a characteristic African American charm containing beads, pins, buttons, a coin with a hole drilled into it, rock crystals, crab claws, a brass ring, brass bell, and pieces of bones and glass, was discovered during an excavation of Charles Carroll's home in Annapolis, Maryland. The cache was located underneath the northeast corner of the home and is thought to have been buried there by an African American slave.<sup>21</sup>

When slavery was abolished and African Americans in the United States became more mobile, these influential Congo ways of thinking did not disappear. Conjure practices continued in small towns and big cities while at the same time, *minkisi*-like objects continued to be fashioned in similar forms for related functions, one of the primary being personal protection. From here the Congo concept of containment becomes increasingly influential.

---

19. For further reading see Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slave Life," in Campbell and Rice, eds., *Before Freedom Came*, 155-175.; *Hildebrand Plantation*, information obtained from didactic panels at the Pink Palace Museum, Memphis Tennessee, 1 November 2009.

20. *Hildebrand Plantation*, information obtained from didactic panels at the Pink Palace Museum, Memphis Tennessee, 1 November 2009.

21. Anand Prahlad, ed. *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Africa American Folklore* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 220; Charles Carroll is one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and one of the founding fathers of the American government, Eric Adams, "Religion and Freedom: Artifacts indicate that African culture persisted even in slavery," *Omni magazine* 16, no. 2 (Nov. 1993):8.



### *African American Culture: Containment*

Robert Farris Thompson recognized the connections between *minkisi* and African American-made bottle trees in the 1980's (Fig. 9).<sup>22</sup> While the use of house protecting *minkisi* is common in the Congo, the fact that glass bottles have been appropriated as charms by Congo Africans and African Americans alike strengthens this relationship in reference to formal characteristics. In 1791, a slave owner in Dominica observed that his slaves had, "...confidence in sticks, stones and earth from graves hung in bottles in their gardens."<sup>23</sup> Less than 100 hundred years later in the southern part of the United States, African American's placed bottles on trees in front of their homes.

A common African American belief during the antebellum period was that evil spirits had the ability to leave their body (the original container) at will and travel during the night. An acceptable practice was to place a well greased bottle by the bed so that it may capture and trap any evil spirit that visited.<sup>24</sup> The concept behind this idea was repeated in bottle trees and while the glass containers no longer contained "spirit-embodiment" or "spirit-directing" materials, these bottles still represented other worldly power.<sup>25</sup> Bringing to mind the flexibility in function of Congo *minkisi*, bottle trees from the antebellum period were believed to bring rain, make trees bloom, bring good luck, and repel evil from the home.<sup>26</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was a general belief that evil

---

22. For further reading see, Robert Farris Thompson, "The Song That Named the Land," in Rozelle, et. al. eds., *Black Arts Ancestral Legacy* (Dallas: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), 123-135.

23. Ibid., 126.

24. Young, *Rituals*, 134.

25. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1983), 145.

26. Thompson, "The Song That Named the Land," 126.130.

spirits, attracted to the colorful glass, would enter the bottles and then get trapped inside.<sup>27</sup> When the wind blew one could hear the moans of the evil spirits arrested inside the containers.<sup>28</sup> The Congo derived notion that the bottle is capable of containing spirit and is therefore powerful, has been observed in bottle trees, bottle lined graves and bottle lined homes in the American South (Fig. 10).<sup>29</sup>

### ***African American Culture: Gardens, Yards and Grave Decoration***

Robert Farris Thompson and Gray Gundaker acknowledge that similarities to Congo *minkisi* are apparent in the approach to gardening and the land, as observed in African American rural communities and homes.<sup>30</sup> For example, yard shows are the epitome of appropriation and objects are typically adapted to a spiritual connection that serves a personal need (Fig. 11).<sup>31</sup> Joe Minter from Birmingham, Alabama explains the use of readily available materials in his yard show by saying, “The whole idea handed down to me by God is to use that which has been discarded.... That what is invisible, thrown away, could be made into something so it demonstrates, that even what gets

---

27. Charles Reagan Wilson and William R. Ferris, ed., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1989), 495- 496.

28. Ibid.

29. Thompson, *Flash*, 145.

30. For further reading see, Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993), 74-95 and Grey Gundaker, “Tradition and Innovation in African American Yards,” *African Arts* 26 (1993):58-96.

31. Objects observed in African American gardens and yards are typically explained as serving protective or preventative measures. For further reading see, Grey Gundaker, *No Space Hidden: The Spirit of African American Yard Work* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

thrown away, with a spirit in it can survive and grow. A spirit of all the people that has touched and felt that material has stayed in the material.”<sup>32</sup>

Minter’s explanation is common among creators of yard shows and calls to mind those “spirit-embodying” materials that evoke a specific spirit. Also, traditionally accepted “spirit embodying” materials that evoke *mpemba*, such as seashells, reflective objects, rock piles and grave-like configurations are used to “decorate” the home and yard for reasons very site-specific, individualized and complex.

In *Face of the Gods*, Robert Farris Thompson begins an interesting argument for African American yard shows containing “spirit-directing materials.” The most significant of these is containers, interpreted by Thompson as directing spirits to, “be contained.” Aside from using bottles to line the exterior home and other areas of the yard, Thompson observed a wide-spread African American tradition of placing jars, bottles, jugs or other vessels on either side of the main entrance of the home.<sup>33</sup> These observations call attention to a distinct characteristic of the African American yard show; a preoccupation with containers.<sup>34</sup>

The general consensus among individuals engaged in this practice is that the vessels near the front door “send evil back to its sources.”<sup>35</sup> Providing a direct relationship with *minkisi*, artist John Biggers recalls a childhood memory by saying, “I

---

32. William Arnett and Paul Arnett, eds., *Souls Grown Deep, Vol. 2 African American Vernacular Art of the South*, (Atlanta: Tinwood, 2001), 502.

33. Thompson, *Face of the Gods*, 127.

34. Thompson says, “Be contained; within a vessel on the porch, within gleaming glass vessels impaled on a tree or filled with colored water and set in a window, within a whitewashed rock boundary, within a line of quartz pebbles,” for further reading see Thompson, *Face of the Gods*, 78 and Gundaker, “Tradition and Innovation in African American Yards,” 58-96;

35. Thompson, “The Song That Named the Land,” 123.

remember jars on the porch, they often contained objects considered to have power. It was a very individualistic form of phrasing, these medicines, actual or implied within the jars. Knowledge of them was not necessarily shared.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally, in 1993, a characteristic yard show in Austin, Texas displayed a large collection of objects all of which, “are clearly for catching things;” among them flower pots, urns, a toilet, and a bird cage (Fig. 12).<sup>37</sup> While the containers do not always have “medicines” inside, just like the bottle tree tradition, the belief that the container is capable of possessing spirit and is therefore powerful, remains intact.

Important adaptations of Congo religious thought and practice can be observed as the traditional functions of the “container,” the “spirit-embodying” materials and the “spirit directing” materials that make up *minkisi* begin to shift and blur. This change is characterized by a growing concern for spirits of recently deceased family members and the objects associated with those individual spirits specifically. For example, a woman who had a yard show in Austin, Texas identified the iron pot on her porch as belonging to her late mother who used to cook hominy in it. A stone, also on her porch was placed there because her late husband collected it on a trip, “We used to argue about it and now it’s all I have of him,” she explained.<sup>38</sup> Identified by Grey Gundaker as “experienced materials,” it is a common African American belief that objects once belonging to a person now deceased are considered more spiritually powerful than new objects.<sup>39</sup>

---

36. Thompson, “The Song That Named the Land,” 127.

37. Thompson, *Face of the Gods*, 87, plate 70.

38. Ibid., 94.

39. Gundaker, *No Space Hidden*, 36.

This significant shift in ways of thinking about and using material objects to access other worldly power is demonstrated in Congo grave decoration and African American grave decoration in the American South. It is a widespread African belief that spirits of recently deceased family members possess the strongest power to affect the living.<sup>40</sup> These spirits are sometimes called upon more often than God because they have a particular interest in what is going on with the family.<sup>41</sup> Spirits of the recently deceased are thought to speak two languages, that of the spiritual world and that of the human world, and likewise, they are seen as the most effective mediator between the two.<sup>42</sup>

Congo society in particular is known for taking special consideration with grave arrangement and decoration in order to attain blessings from the recently dead (Fig. 13). Ancestors (*Bakulu*) are considered the most powerful type of spirit in the Congo spiritual hierarchy, making the tomb arguably the most effective *nkisi*.<sup>43</sup> The gravesite is viewed as an important site through which one can communicate with his/her ancestors and call upon the spirits to affect change in the land of the living.<sup>44</sup> For example, a man in the Congo explained that his mother died while he was away. When he returned he visited

---

40. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Johannesburg, South Africa: Heinemann Educational Publisher, 1991), 7; Herskovits, *Myth of the Negro Past*, 197.

41. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83-84.

42. Ibid., 83.

43. Jeffrey E. Anderson, *Conjure in African American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 29-30; Wyatt MacGaffey discusses a number of *minkisi* that are directly related to ancestral spirits in, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: the BaKongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 145-156.

44. Anderson, *Conjure*, 30; Young, *Rituals*, 148.

her and touched her plate and cup which had been placed on her grave. After doing this he was confident that he would later dream what his mother wanted him to know.<sup>45</sup>

The tomb functions as the container of the spirit.<sup>46</sup> During burial, the earth is sometimes stepped over and mashed down to seal the spirit within.<sup>47</sup> Objects are then placed on the surface of the grave to both honor the spirit and call it into action. Common materials include shells, rocks, and objects, the color of white, evoking *mpemba*. Containers too, typically broken or turned upside down are placed on the burial mound.<sup>48</sup> Objects last used by the deceased, or associated with the deceased's occupation are thought to possess the most spiritual power and are placed on graves to satisfy the spirit and communicate with the spirit.<sup>49</sup> The end result of this is a visual representation that evokes astonishment, signifying the power of the spirit within.

Henry Carrington Bolton was perhaps the first to draw connections between African American and Congo grave decoration. In 1891 he published a short piece in the *Journal of American Folklore* titled, "Decoration of Graves of Negroes in South Carolina." Bolton describes his observation of "shells, white pebbles, pieces of broken crockery, an abundance of glass medicine bottles and non-descript bric-a-brac of a cheap sort" among the African American graves in South Carolina.<sup>50</sup> He goes on to reveal that the locals had no explanation for their practice and he was left puzzled until reading E.J.

---

45. Thompson, *Flash*, 134.

46. Ibid., 132.

47. Young, *Rituals*, 149.

48. Ibid., 142.

49. Ibid., 132-135, 149.

50. Henry Carrington Bolton, "Decoration of Negro Graves in South Carolina," 4 no. 14 (July-September 1891): 214, accessed 31 January 2010, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/534005>.

Glaves' "Fetishism in Congo Land," published the same month in *The Century*. Glaves' article describes his experiences during an extended stay in the Congo and includes images taken from sketches in his notebook. Bolton revealed his excitement when seeing a drawing of a decorated grave belonging to a Congo chieftain in which broken crockery forms a barrier around the mound and is also arranged on top of it (Fig.13). Bolton concluded the article by stating his satisfaction with finding the origin of the African American practice.<sup>51</sup>

In the United States, African American cemeteries throughout the South possessed characteristics nearly identical to Congo graves, especially up until the early twentieth-century. Common materials placed on graves include, medicine bottles positioned upside down, cracked water pitchers, river shells or seashells where available, objects the color of white and personal objects belonging to or last used by the deceased (Fig. 14, 15).<sup>52</sup> In Georgia for example, Robert Farris Thompson observed that those material objects once belonging to or associated with the deceased, continued to possess the most spiritual power and by placing them on the grave site one could satisfy the spirit and communicate with it most effectively.<sup>53</sup>

Thompson believed that nowhere was Congo influence more pronounced than in the African American cemetery tradition in the American South. He argued that Congo beliefs and practices continued in the United States, expressed in a growing concern for

---

51. Ibid.

52. John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 139-144; Young, *Rituals...*, 163-164; Ingersoll, "Decoration of Negro Graves," *The Journal of American Folklore* 5, no. 16 (Jan-Mar 1892):68-69.

53. Thompson, *Flash*, 134; In the Georgia Writer's Project study, *Drums and Shadows*, ex-slave Sarah Washington was quoted as saying, "I dohn guess yuh be bodduh much by duh spirits ef yuh gib em a good fewnul an put duh tings wut belong tuh em on top uh duh grave," Raboteau, 85.

honoring and communicating with familial spirits through cemetery rituals adapted by slaves during the antebellum era. Congo Africans and African Americans believed that upon death, one attained the highest status of authority and power, one that surpassed that of the master class. Slaves and later freed African Americans therefore called upon the spirits of the deceased especially, because the deceased had power over all of the living.<sup>54</sup>

### ***African American Culture: The Memory Jug***

Robert Farris Thompson and John Vlach have both made efforts to establish a position for memory jugs in the growing scholarship on African retentions in the African Diaspora (Fig. 16).<sup>55</sup> Included among discussions of Africanisms in the United States, memory jugs are typically introduced alongside comparisons to African American grave decoration. Both scholars draw connections by emphasizing the similarities between materials found on the jugs and materials found on African American grave sites. Agreeing with the general consensus that memory jugs at one point in time were made in honor of a deceased person, my thesis examines the relationship between *minkisi* and memory jugs in order to establish a stronger link to origins in the Congo and African American expressive culture. I argue that Congo religious thought, manifested in *minkisi*, is responsible for the visual and ideological similarities between memory jugs and African American grave sites, strengthening the previously established analogy between the two.

---

54. Young, *Rituals*, 165-166; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 79.

55. For further reading, see Thompson, *Face of the Gods*, 74-95 and Vlach, *Afro- American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, 139-150.



A memory jug in its most basic form is a container upon which small, found materials are embellished to an exaggerated degree. While certain objects on the surface are recurring such as seashells, buttons, nails and screws, no two memory jugs are the same. They are never signed, never dated, and possess an unexplainable mysteriousness. This air of mystery is provoked by the astonishing array of natural and man-made artifacts clustered on the exterior of the container. One could spend hours studying the object and pondering who, what, where, when and why. However, viewing memory jugs through the lens of Congo *minkisi* may provide some answers.

Similar to the African American yard show, memory jugs are the epitome of appropriation. Objects on the jugs are a mix of traditionally accepted “spirit-embodying” materials that evoke *mpemba* such as shells, which are almost universal, and occasionally rocks or mirrors. The majority of objects are recognizably more personal and therefore identified with a specific spirit such as keys, a comb, tools, or a fork. There are objects associated with traditional “spirit-directing” materials too, among the most common, nails and screws. There is even evidence of the creolization of *minkisi* in America as objects often used in African American charms such as coins, buttons, and pottery shards are a common find on memory jugs. Calling to mind the diversity in form and the flexibility in function of *bilongo*, each of these objects possesses an individual reason for being, all too personal to determine without the maker.

Similar to *minkisi* the overall effect of a memory jug is one of astonishment and mystery. When the memory jug is most intricate and complex it evokes more memories, takes on increasingly diverse functions and the spirit of the person deceased is perceived strongest. Just as tying, knotting and binding is used to reflect the power of the spirit

within an *nkisi*, the complex system of objects on the outside of a memory jug also reflects the magnitude of influence of the spirit recently passed.

One of the more curious characteristics of the memory jug is that the diverse array of material objects is affixed to the surface of a container. Given the influential concept of containment and its evolution in bottle trees and African American gardens and yards in the United States, the choice of jug, jar, bottle, or pitcher, begins to make sense. Some memory jugs even have stoppers or lids making them comparable to the *minkisi* and African American charms sealed inside glass bottles (Fig. 5, 17, 18). While the majority of memory jugs are created using vessels that never had lids and also have nothing inside, the Congo derived notion that the container is capable of possessing spirit and therefore powerful, remains intact just as it did in bottle trees, bottle lined homes, bottle lined graves and containers on front porches in the American South.

The influence and power attributed to family members recently deceased is demonstrated in the discussion of African and African American grave decoration.<sup>56</sup> The grave site represents a location where two separate, yet related practices can be observed: using material objects to command the spirit into action, practiced in *minkisi*, and using the same material objects to honor the spirit so that it may look upon the living favorably, observed in memory jugs. Just like an *nkisi*, an early memory jug should be viewed as a portable grave. In the same way that an African American woman places a sewing box on her mother's grave to satisfy her soul, a person may place the thimble and needle of a seamstress on her memory jug.

---

56. The term "recently deceased," is used to describe the African term, "living dead," Recall that this term is applied to a spirit in the family that passed away within the last five generations and is still remembered by someone living in physical form, Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religions*, 77-78; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 82, 83, 85.

John S. Mbiti explains that individuals feel closer to spirits of the recently deceased because they continue to have a personal connection to them both in memory and emotion.<sup>57</sup> It is here that the function of the exterior material objects begins to shift and blur as the same thimble and needle also evoke specific memories in the maker, aid in the grieving process and allow the spirit of the deceased to live on. While the intended function of modern memory jugs is diverse, the origin of the memory jug practice and the ideas associated with it returns to the fundamental African religious belief that the recently deceased must be honored and remembered.<sup>58</sup> This practice is paralleled in the most powerful and called upon *nkisi*, the Congo grave.

---

57. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religions*, 79.

58. The same could be said for grave decoration too. Grave decoration serves multiple functions both personal and spiritual, however the fundamental reason for that practice goes back to the African belief that one must honor his/her family members who have recently past.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MEMORY JUGS: MODERN OBJECTS OF MEMORY AND HONOR

#### *Introduction*

Once upon a time, a slave girl in Mississippi carried water in a blue pitcher from a nearby spring to the home of her masters. One day she tripped, knocking the pitcher to the ground and spilling water over her face. When she returned to her master's wife, the woman took pity on the girl thinking she had been crying and sent her home without a flogging and with the broken blue pitcher. The slave woman was thankful and kept the vessel throughout her life as a reminder of that day when her master showed mercy. When her husband died in the early twentieth-century, she further broke the pitcher into small colorful pieces and arranged them around his grave. The sentimental decoration called to mind a lifetime of memories and served as a connection between her soul and his.<sup>1</sup>

Bridging the gap between modern ideas of memory and commemoration in reference to the deceased and the African material culture from which scholars suggest the memory jug practice originates is not an easy task. The above story demonstrates how Congo-derived grave decoration practices in America evolved into modern day memorial practices in African American culture. Given the parallels that can be drawn between African American gravesites and memory jugs established in Chapter One and Two, I begin Chapter Three by proposing that a similar transformation occurred with the

---

1. Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 163.

memory jug practice. While there is no question that memory is a central component of memory jugs in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, it is important to emphasize that the term “memory jug” is a modern label applied to objects once referred to as “what-not jugs,” “ugly jugs,” “spirit jars,” and “whimsy jugs” to name a few. Working with the concept that memory serves a modern function of the memory jug, the objective of Chapter Three is to explore how the contemporary memory jug practice has evolved from a time when the objects were constructed for and directly related to funerary rituals and spiritual practices to the present-day when the objects are still related to commemoration and communication with spirits of the recently deceased, but increasingly linked to a practice driven by personal reflection and memory. As memory becomes increasingly influential to the memory jug practice during the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, the function of the memory jug transitions yet again, while retaining characteristics of Congo *minkisi*.

### ***Memory, Motive and Aesthetics in the Art of Karen Fischer***

*“Memory jugs are so connected to my ancestors, my spirituality, and my emotional and psychological feelings about objects” –Karen Fischer*

In Fort Collins, Colorado there is an artist named Laurie Beth Zuckerman. Originally from the west coast, she first became aware of memory jugs while living in Virginia. After purchasing one she spotted at a flea market and then reading *Forget-Me-Not: The Art & Mystery of Memory Jugs*, published by the Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem University, years later Zuckerman created her first memory jug. Today she exhibits her memory jugs frequently and teaches workshops on the process to individuals

like herself who show interest in collecting everyday objects and making meaning out of them. By publicizing her artwork and teaching workshops, other memory jug artists have emerged from the surrounding areas and there exists today a mini-colony of memory jug makers who are familiar with each other's work.<sup>2</sup>

One of these artists is Karen Fischer who first became aware of memory jugs during her graduate school studies at the Art Institute of Chicago. Fischer admitted that when she first met Laurie Zuckerman she was surprised to encounter a contemporary memory jug artist. She later enrolled in Zuckerman's workshop and found the process familiar as she has a background in mosaics.<sup>3</sup> Fischer's aesthetic concerns and motive are of particular interest because they maintain qualities typical of African spiritual practices and African American creative expression while at the same time deviate from the traditional ways of thinking about memory jugs.

During her childhood, Fischer's family spent summers in Wyoming on the family ranch. The property occupies a portion of the Overland Trail, one of the early pioneer trails that led settlers from back east to out west. She and her sister grew up collecting objects along the trail with their mother, who made them very aware of the history behind the historical landmark and the land that their family now owns. The artist describes one of her memory jugs as a metaphor for growing up on the Overton Trail (Fig. 19). She explains the function of this vessel as three-fold, serving as a memorial to the place, the people in her family that have lived there, and the Native Americans and pioneers that occupied the land before them. The memory jug also has a strong connection to her

---

2. Laurie Zuckerman, telephone interview by author, 19 July 2009.

3. Karen Fischer, telephone interview by author, 24 August 2009.

grandmother; a family member she was especially close to and who is now deceased. Items collected from the family ranch include stones, fragments of crockery, and a flattened spoon. She also included beads that her sister gave her and buttons that belonged to her grandmother. The horse medallion is one of the store-bought items, carefully sought out and purchased at a flea market. Inside the memory jug Fischer placed rose petals from her grandmother's rose bush that was transplanted from her mother's childhood home in Denver to Fort Collins, Colorado. The artist goes on to reveal that she views the inside of the jug as the spirit and leaving it empty didn't feel right. She views the rose petals inside as her grandmother's spirit. Heightening personal significance for the creator, the rose petals are not intended to be viewed and usually go unnoticed.<sup>4</sup>

Fischer is currently collecting objects to make additional memory jugs. She calls one *The Spirit Jug* and says that it will be about her own spirituality. Another jug called *Never Enough* will be about her relationship with her mother. Fischer explains that she is somewhat of a disappointment to her mother because she never married and had children and reveals that the two share bitter feelings. "The jug is not meant to evoke sentiment, but will be more sarcastic." She describes using a lot of pink and frilly objects to symbolize her childhood and the potential she once possessed. Fischer admits that when her parents die she could see herself making a memory jug for each of them that functions more as a commemorative device, much like the *Overland Trail Jug* and its relation to her grandmother's spirit and the family land. The artist plans to use more personal possessions than store bought items for her parent's memory jugs and will place

---

4. Fischer, interview by author; Fischer's treatment of her *Overland Trail Jug* parallels a basic description of a *nkisi*: a container for the spirits within.

artifacts from the ranch inside. “Sagebrush in my dad’s, horse hair in my mom’s,” she says.<sup>5</sup>

The objects on Karen Fischer’s *Overland Trail Jug* evoke memories about a number of things related to but certainly not limited to individuals recently deceased. In its most raw form, the jug is really a memorial to a place. Many artifacts were gathered in a specific area and therefore evoke memories of a certain landscape. Fischer’s inclusion of objects that recall her own family members come full circle to represent a particular relationship to this land. As a child she explored the trail with her sister, making the beads that her sister gave her a logical addition to the memory jug. The buttons and rose petals associated with her grandmother operate as a connection between her own white ancestors and the Hawke’s, the original white family who homesteaded the land. The store-bought horse medallion evokes memories of the real horses that grazed the land then and now.<sup>6</sup> A close examination of a nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jug reveals that a similar process and motive must be considered.

Object number one, (Fig. 20) purchased at a yard sale around 1989 in Jackson, Tennessee, is especially unique because there is a landscape painting on the surface of the vessel.<sup>7</sup> The painting depicts a rural riverside at dusk. On the left-hand side a sparse tree dominates the middle ground, its branches reaching into the sky and hovering over the water. The water takes up a large portion of the image, grey and calm. In the background a glowing sunset is suspended over a horizon line dotted with trees and wilderness. From here the sky transitions out from yellow to dark. The painting is framed

---

5. Fischer, interview by author.

6. Ibid.

7. Private collector, interview by author, 2009.



by two rows of delicate seashells that appear to be found rather than store bought as they do not have any lacquer or coating on them and almost all of them have bits of gravel stuck inside. The shells in the first carefully arranged row are one-quarter inch in length, white, and olive shaped. The outer row consists of various types of larger white river shells, all of similar shape.

The object consists of a stoneware ceramic vessel covered in thick putty with mostly metal objects; rusted gears, springs, buckles, nails and well-used tools, laid into its surface.<sup>8</sup> The walls of the vessel are too thick to have been formed by a mold therefore it is likely that this container was thrown on a wheel and fired by hand.<sup>9</sup> A few objects of interest include a broken railroad spike, three different shoe hooks, a walnut shell and a broken pocket knife. On the front of the memory jug directly above the seashell-framed painting is a collection of what appear to be animal bones. The small bones are centered between the top of the painting and the lip of the vessel in a 2" x 3" area. One of the most obvious artifacts is a *German Shoulder head* that is not broken but rather removed from its original muslin body. There is a diverse collection of shells on this jug. In addition to the seashell frame, making a boarder around the lip of the vessel is a series of uniform, seemingly store bought shells. There are also two cowry shells, a mussel shell and two small conch shells.<sup>10</sup>

---

8. Nails, screws and pieces of metal are nearly universal to memory jugs and call to mind "spirit directing materials," *nkisi nkondi*, and the nails, blades, pins and needles found inside African American charms during and post antebellum periods.

9. Nancy White, Associate Professor of Ceramics at the University of Memphis, interview by author, Memphis, TN, 3 November 2009.

10. Shells are among the most common artifacts found on memory jugs and recall that they are also the most universal component to any Congo *minkisi*.

When my grandmother discovered the memory vessel it was being used as a door prop on the front porch of a home having a yard sale calling to mind the African American southern tradition of placing containers near the front entrance of the home for protection.<sup>11</sup> An approximate date range has not been established but due to its fragile condition it is safe to assume that the object is not contemporary. The paint is now deteriorating, the putty is cracked and lost in certain areas, and a large number of artifacts on the outside are missing. At the time of purchase there was a collection of objects stored inside of the jug including a few pottery shards, an old key, a nail file and a large button, likely from a couch, curtain or similar home décor.<sup>12</sup> While it is fair to assume that the objects stored inside of the jug are nothing more than missing pieces from the exterior, Karen Fischer's process is proof that there is an equal possibility that the artifacts were placed there intentionally.<sup>13</sup> The same consideration should be taken for all nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs after all there are several memory jugs on the market and in museums that have stoppers in their openings. For example, *Memory Decanter with Red Wax and Indian Head Penny* (Fig. 17) located at the Smithsonian and (Figure 18), owned by a private collector.<sup>14</sup>

Karen Fisher's *Overland Trail Jug*, her proposed *Spirit Jug*, and proposed *Never Enough* memory vessel are case studies that suggest the memory jug practice has

---

11. Private collector, interview by author.

12. Ibid.

13. Also recall John Biggers' childhood memory from Chapter Two that tells of individuals in his neighborhood placing iron kettles on their front porches, some containing "power objects, either actual or implied," inside.

14. The Smithsonian American Art Museum, "Search Collections: Memory Decanter with Red Wax and Indian Head Penny," available at <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=24940>, accessed 10 December 2009; Laurie Zuckerman, *Memory Jugs: Images, Instructions, Theories*, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2009, book on C.D, 95.

continued to evolve during the nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first centuries. While modern and contemporary memory jugs maintain similarities in materials used and associations with the spiritual realm, they have taken on increasingly diverse functions.<sup>15</sup> The combination of landscape painting and objects such as a walnut shell, broken tools, found river shells and animal bones suggests that Object number one (Fig. 20) is a memorial for a particular place. Consider the creator of this memory jug taking part in a similar process of combing the landscape in search of site-specific relics, previously discarded or unnoticed. Roger Cardinal's thoughts on memory painting offer additional support for understanding the memory jug in this way.

"In the case of folk artists, the translation of a memory-trace into its visual equivalent implies the aesthetic treatment of material which remains emotionally precious."<sup>16</sup> In the genre of memory painting, landscapes are used to give visual birth to memories of certain places or to perpetuate the appearance of locations into the future. Cardinal likens the memory jug and the memory painting in that they both "establish the memorable configuration which will guarantee an emotional link with bygone times."<sup>17</sup> All memorializing practices recognize human mortality, the faultiness of human memory and the desire to remember through inspired simulacra such as the landscape painting, or preserving mementos like the ones found on Object number one.<sup>18</sup>

---

15. Karen Fischer explains that *Never Enough* is the only secular jug that she has created. The *Overland Trail Jug*, *Spirit Jug*, and the additional jugs she is in the process of creating are more strongly associated with spirits of deceased individuals, or in the case of *The Overland Trail Jug*, the spirit of a place, Fischer, interview by author.

16. Charles Russell, *Self Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 95.

17. *Ibid.*, 99.

18. *Ibid.*

### ***Memory, Process and Symbolism in the Art of Laurie Zuckerman***

*“The theory that memory jugs were made to keep idle hands busy is an insult! I am not busying my hands; my jugs are meaningful, intentional, and purposeful. The investment that goes into creating one is far too large.” Laurie Zuckerman*

Object number two (Fig. 16) is a large gold memory jug purchased at an antique store in Jackson, Tennessee, in 2009. It consists of a hand-made earthenware ceramic vessel with a slab bottom and a handle. Objects were attached by a layer of putty and then buried under a thick application of gold paint leaving many artifacts unidentifiable.<sup>19</sup> Confirmed by the previous owner as “old paint,” the jug may predate 1949 because spray paint, which was invented in 1949, is not used.<sup>20</sup> The memory jug is layered with an impressive collection of diverse objects that initially possess no recognizable order. While many artifacts have potential for being very memorable to the maker such as a fork, a small comb, a peach pit, decorative buttons, a shoe hook, and a walnut shell, other objects such as nails, screws, keys, bits of metal and various circular objects are repeated throughout suggesting they operate as visual filler.<sup>21</sup> Also, the unusual addition of a dozen or so peanut shells of various shapes and sizes creates more questions than answers. The only artifact left purposefully uncovered by gold paint is an old circular mirror. Examining the work of Laurie Beth Zuckerman offers insight on Object number two.

---

19. White, interview by author.

20. Ian Attler, Darrell and Ben Chapnick, “The History of Spray Paint,” *Swindle Magazine*, Issue 03, accessed 23 July 2009, available at <http://swindlemagazine.com/issue03/>.

21. Nails, screws and pieces of metal are a nearly universal to memory jugs and call to mind “spirit directing materials,” *nkisi nkondi*, and the nails, blades, pins and needles found inside African American charms during and post antebellum periods.

Zuckerman teaches painting and drawing at Front Range Community College in Fort Collins, Colorado and is known for her contemporary altars and memorial artwork. For a period of seven years she lived in Roanoke, Virginia, and it is here that her interest in memory jugs was ignited. At a flea market, Zuckerman spotted a memory jug with two African American figures on it and because she was collecting black memorabilia at the time, she purchased the jug thinking it was African American in origin. After gathering objects for an entire year, in 2004 Zuckerman made her first memory jug. She explained that the format seemed like the perfect solution for creating something out of all the smaller objects that she could not include on her altars. Drawing connections to *minkisi*, she goes on to describe her memory jugs as scaled down versions of her altars or miniature altars-in-the-round.<sup>22</sup> Zuckerman's process and use of symbolism is of particular interest as they reflect fresh interpretive possibilities and more in-depth ways of seeing and thinking about the artifacts found on Object number two (Fig. 16).

"I call them story jugs because with my jugs I can tell different vignettes," the artist explains. When describing her process Zuckerman reveals that all of the objects on her memory jugs are carefully selected, often taking her years to collect for just one piece.<sup>23</sup> The artist also spends considerable time searching for the perfect vessel that will serve as the foundation of her memory jug, paying close attention to size, shape and material. For example, if she has a large collection of artifacts set aside for a particular work, she intentionally looks for a larger vessel to serve as the foundation.<sup>24</sup>

---

22. Zuckerman's association of memory jugs with altars strengthens the relationship between memory jugs and *minkisi*. Karen Fischer also views her memory jugs as a spiritually potent, "working objects," Zuckerman, interview by author; Fischer, interview by author.

23. Zuckerman, interview by author.

24. Zuckerman, *Memory Jugs: Images, Instructions & Theories*, 19.

Before the actual assemblage begins, Zuckerman sorts the artifacts repeatedly, editing out those which do not seem to fit within the central theme, story or vignette she is trying to convey.<sup>25</sup> Once she is satisfied that her collection contains all the right pieces, the artist measures the circumference and height of her selected jug and then plots the surface area out in a two-dimensional visualization on large paper.<sup>26</sup> Zuckerman begins her composition by constructing a focal point or central scene from the objects that are most significant. From there she branches out, carefully laying all the artifacts onto a table, arranging them just as they will appear on the memory jug (Fig. 21). Zuckerman views the memory jug as having four distinct faces: front, back, left side, and right side, and each dimension is dealt with separately. She also teaches a second method that involves dividing the object into two planes: front and back.<sup>27</sup>

Once Zuckerman is satisfied with her arrangements, the detailed assemblage begins. Using window putty, the artist works in sections, smoothing out a 1/8"-1/4" layer and pressing objects into the surface. Because window putty takes months to fully dry, the adhesive allows her to reposition objects during the weeks-long assemblage process. Zuckerman is able to crowd objects closer, spread them apart, or completely remove or reposition them if needed.<sup>28</sup> From collecting objects to completing the assemblage this

---

25. Zuckerman, interview by author.

26. Zuckerman, *Memory Jugs: Images, Instructions & Theories*, 21.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 23.

entire process takes the artist anywhere from one to two years to complete one memory jug.<sup>29</sup>

In explaining Laurie Zuckerman's process, a resourceful method of examining memory jugs is suggested. Similar to *minkisi*, the improvisational aesthetic quality typical of memory jugs is quite deceiving. Memory jugs are carefully planned out objects and the arrangement of artifacts on nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs should be viewed as intentional. In support of this approach, a more informed examination shows parallels between Laurie Zuckerman's creative process and the mind of the unknown creator of Object number two.

The maker of Object number two (Fig. 16) selected a large jug to serve as the foundation, and rightly so as there are an overwhelming number of artifacts attached to the jug's surface. The memory jug has a definite front and back side as well as an obvious focal point signified by the old circular mirror, untouched by putty or paint. While at first glance objects seemed to be arranged haphazardly, artist intent becomes evident in the arrangement of objects around the mirror. Above the mirror an artifact resembling a fragment of a bicycle chain was arranged to mimic the curvature of the mirror, emphasizing its importance. Positioned directly below the mirror is the body of a broken Frozen Charlotte doll. A popular collector's item today, Frozen Charlotte dolls were common children's toys in the late 1800's and early 1900's.<sup>30</sup> This Frozen Charlotte doll appears to be positioned purposefully underneath the mirror, creating an abstract replacement for the missing head. Not only is this arrangement premeditated, one could

---

29. Zuckerman, interview by author.

30. Frank Nickell, Professor of History and Director of The Center for Regional History in Cape Girardeau Missouri, telephone interview by author, 25 July 2009.

even argue that a specific message or narrative is being conveyed in the central scene. One can speculate that it is either the viewer or the maker who is supposed to see him/herself in the reflection.

From this focal point, objects radiate out. Similar to a jigsaw puzzle artifacts are positioned tightly, side by side, leaving little to no empty space in between. On the viewer's right hand side, an almost identical Frozen Charlotte doll motif is repeated (Fig. 22). Here a smaller doll also with a missing head is situated in a sea of mementos. A small, circular object, likely a button, is carefully positioned where the missing head would otherwise be.

Matching this inherent quality of intentionality, Laurie Zuckerman's use of symbolism makes a strong statement about how individual objects on a memory jug should be viewed and interpreted that echoes Congo *minkisi*. The artist revealed the history of a collection of seashells that she used on a memory jug made in reference to her now deceased mother. While cleaning out her mother's house, she came across the shells and recognized them as being the same ones that she had given to her mother as a child after a trip to the beach. She was surprised and pleased to rediscover them among her mother's possessions and they now hold great personal significance, evoking memories of her childhood, her mother, and the relationship between the two.<sup>31</sup>

When questioned about the symbolism she attached to nails used in Zuckerman revealed that she used nails on a jug titled, *Shell of Her Former Self* initially for aesthetic reasons, explaining that she liked the shape.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, the nails reminded her of

---

31. Recall that shells are a universal material in Congo *minkisi*; Zuckerman, interview by author.

32. Recall that nails are traditional materials used in both Congo *minkisi* and African American charms



Christ's crucifixion and because of that they hold a certain religious significance.

Zuckerman emphasized that each and every object on her memory jugs is rich in personal symbolism and that nothing, not even the smallest nail should be overlooked or assumed to be simply filler.<sup>33</sup>

The artist's explanation of the meaning attached to certain objects on her memory jugs suggests that when examining a nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jug, the primary source of information is made available through the objects affixed to its surface. To disregard an artifact is to undermine the object's potential power of aiding in the understanding of the memory jug as whole. Zuckerman's use of symbolism supports that each and every object should be treated as equally important as the next. No artifact, however minute, out-of-place, or abundant should be overlooked for meaning and significance.

Offering further support for these methods of approaching memory jugs is Object number three, (Fig. 23) a memory jug from Cape Girardeau, Missouri. The complexity of this memory jug deepens when a detailed investigation of a number of objects shows that each artifact possessed its own unique history. In establishing these histories it becomes evident that every object however common or minute has the power to reveal something about the memory jug. Visual analysis of this memory jug also reveals that the arrangement of exterior artifacts is again, carefully planned out and intentional.

Object number three, made up of a glass jar covered in putty, has been assigned an approximate date range of 1923-1989. Only through a detailed investigation of the objects on the jar's surface is it realized that many of the artifacts are from the 1920's and

---

33. Similar to a memory jug, each and every object inside an *nkisi* has a purpose for being there, often too specific and personal to be determined without consulting the *ngagna* or the maker; Zuckerman, interview by author.

1930's. Most obvious is the Cape County Rural Schools graduating class pin (Fig. 24) from which the earliest possible date of creation was established. Upon successful completion of the eighth grade, students and families in Cape Girardeau County traveled to the county seat in Jackson, Missouri to attend an elaborate graduation ceremony and celebration. Students put on performances, were presented with special awards, and given a diploma and a graduating class pin such as the one found on this memory jug to commemorate their achievement. The graduation ceremony marked a major life transition for all, much like high school graduation today, as some students went on to high school while others went to work.<sup>34</sup>

Also on this memory jug is a Bakelite buckle, (Fig. 24) probably off of a woman's dress.<sup>35</sup> Bakelite is an early type of plastic that was invented in 1909. It was first used as an industrial material in the form of floor tiles, electrical insulators, and chemical and fire proof coatings but by the end of the 1920's Bakelite had gained popularity and was branded "The Material of a Thousand Uses."<sup>36</sup> A diverse range of manufacturers began using Bakelite including the automobile industry, the home décor industry and most importantly for the study of this memory jug, the fashion industry. Sales persisted through the Depression era and production lasted until WWII when other plastics such as Plexiglas and Nylon were invented. Today Bakelite is a collectors' item.<sup>37</sup>

---

34. Nickell, interview by author.

35. Ibid.

36. David E. Brown, *Inventing Modern America: from the microwave to the mouse* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 48-49.

37. Brown, *Inventing Modern America*, 50-51.

There are two different trade coins on this jug that are unfortunately attached in a way that only allows the viewer to examine one side. Common in the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's due to the economic effects of WWI and The Great Depression, trade coins were manufactured to function as a substitute for U.S. currency when there was a shortage of physical money. Trade coins were commonly given as change instead of actual U.S. currency, offering discounts on collective purchases or specific merchandise. During this time period, trade coins were used by many businesses around Cape Girardeau County.<sup>38</sup>

Cape Girardeau, Missouri sits on the Mississippi River and has always been a melting pot of both southern and northern influences. There are a number of artifacts on this jug that are associated with the southern regions of the United States including a peanut shell and an oyster shell. Peanuts are a southern crop and Cape Girardeau occupies one of the areas farthest north that peanuts can be grown. In the U.S. peanuts have a reputation for being valuable to low income families and also have a history of being given as special gifts at Christmas time. Oyster shells are another southern artifact. Because the water is too warm and too muddy, oyster shells are a rare find in Cape Girardeau and are locally treasured as good luck.<sup>39</sup>

Additional objects of interest on Object number three include clock parts, jewelry, children's toys, a small women's makeup compact and an arrowhead. Due to the farming that goes on in the Cape Girardeau County area, arrowheads are a common find. In the early 1900's an individual would have been even more likely to find an arrowhead as complete as this one, as fields had not yet been picked over to the extent that they are

---

38. Nickell, interview by author.

39. Ibid.

today. To find an arrowhead has always been a special experience, and accordingly, arrowheads have always been a treasured object and a local collectible.<sup>40</sup> The jewelry, toys and makeup compact hold potential for being symbolic or meaningful on a personal level as well as calling forth an interesting history of their own.

Productive results can come from doing in-depth visual analyses such as this. The fact that a number of artifacts on Object number three are confirmed to be from the 1920's suggests that the maker created the jug for a specific memory that took place within a narrow time frame. If this jug were made in remembrance of a person who died, the deceased most likely did not live to a mature age as the time frame of the objects used do not span an entire lifetime but are instead confined to a 10 to 20 year period. A more convincing argument is that this memory jug was created as a commemorative object for a particular event, perhaps the eighth grade graduation. During the eighth grade, students are between the ages of twelve and fourteen. The objects on this jug could easily fit into a twelve- to fourteen-year time span.

In terms of intentionality and its role in the creative process, a close examination reveals that the arrangement of objects is well thought out. Just below and to the viewers' right of the woman's makeup compact is a broken doll hand positioned horizontally on the jug. (Fig. 25) To the viewers' left of the hand is an imprint in the putty where the maker first positioned the hand vertically and then second guessed and moved the hand to its present horizontal position. Additionally, not all indented areas of putty reflect a missing artifact. To the viewer's right of the previous arrangement there are two circular spiral designs imprinted in the putty, side by side. (Fig. 26) A black bead is positioned over the top of the left-hand imprint, offering proof that the surface designs were made

---

40. Nickell, interview by author.

intentionally rather than being the impression of missing pieces. Just below this arrangement the physical object, likely a button, used to make these imprints is attached to the jug's surface.

It becomes increasingly obvious in comparisons between contemporary and nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs that the process of creating a memory jug is governed by experiences so personal that the symbolic significance of external artifacts can only be known through contact with the maker. Because the process is so personal, the meaning of the carefully selected exterior artifacts will likely differ from memory jug to memory jug. Recall that a collection of seashells on one of Zuckerman's memory jugs represents a specific childhood memory and also evokes memories of the artist's mother. At the same time, the oyster shell on Object number three (Fig. 24), due to its place of origin, may have originally functioned as a token of good luck. Additionally, there is a strong argument that the river shells on Object number one (Fig. 16) may recall memories of a certain place.<sup>41</sup> In the twenty-first-century, even when a memory jug is made in remembrance of a deceased person, it is still deeply personal to the maker, often reflecting the maker's own experiences with that individual. A brief look at the work of Dixie Straight whose motive remains within the traditionally accepted function of the memory jug, offers further support for thinking about memory jugs as personal, individualized objects.

---

41. This significant characteristic forms a connection to Congo *minkisi*, as it echoes the diversity in form and flexibility in function of *bilongo* when spirit-embodiment and spirit-evoking materials overlap

### ***Personal Memory in the Art of Dixie Straight***

*“I make memory jugs by myself. Even though I get most of the objects from my family, the act of making a memory jug is not a family affair. It is a lone sport.”*-Dixie Straight

Dixie Straight, an artist from Loveland, Colorado explained that being active in the Loveland arts community as well as friends with Laurie Zuckerman has made her aware of the memory jug practice for some time. Straight recalls that in 2006, Zuckerman was exhibiting artwork at the Loveland Art Museum that dealt with death and the process of grieving. At the same time Straight was coping with the death of her sister, brother-in-law, and nephew who had recently lost their lives in a car accident. She enrolled in Zuckerman’s workshop along with Karen Fischer and that is where she made her first memory jug.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 27)

Straight began her process with the recent death of her three family members in mind. When describing the finished memory jug, the artist revealed that it evokes a lifetime of stories and happy memories. Using an old wine jug as the base, Straight included jewelry that had belonged to her sister and a baby feeding spoon that had belonged to her nephew. She explained that there are artifacts included from different periods of each person’s life. Straight reveals her personal connection to the memory jug by saying, “When I look at that jug I think to myself, I remember when she wore that to prom, I remember when I bought her that necklace.”<sup>43</sup>

---

42. Dixie Straight, interview by author, 30 August 2009, telephone.

43. Ibid.

Dixie Straight's memory jug is on display in her home, and the artist expressed her excitement when asked about it, exclaiming, "When people ask me about my memory jug it gets me going. I can talk for hours about the jug, the objects, the people and the memories that the objects represent." When asked if the act of assembling the memory jug was therapeutic during the grieving process, Dixie Straight responded yes.

*"Going through the process was good because I can now talk about the people who are deceased out loud. Being able to tell others about my sister and nephew has been very therapeutic. I like talking about them to keep their memory alive. This memory jug has been a way for me to let people know that they are still very much a part of my life."*<sup>44</sup>

Zuckerman offers further support for the personal relationship that exists between the memory jug and its maker. The artist agrees that she too, makes memory jugs for herself and about herself. While it has already been established that Zuckerman uses the memory jug form to tell her personal history, she reveals that she has created mourning pieces too. In explaining these pieces the artist reveals that the mourning vessels are really more about herself than the deceased person. "My mourning jugs are more about my experiences with that person, my own personal memories of that person and my experiences as they relate to the death of that person."<sup>45</sup>

### ***The Memory Jug Maker***

When describing the types of people who enroll in her memory jug workshops Laurie Zuckerman states, "We are all cut from the same cloth." Her students are typically artists or have experience in creative processes such as mosaics.<sup>46</sup> It is also true that each

---

44. Straight, interview by author.

45. Zuckerman, interview by author.

46. Ibid.

of the memory jug artists introduced in this chapter has enjoyed a career as an artist and shared a background in diverse creative processes. Karen Fischer studied photography in college, has experience in mosaics and jewelry making, creates large-scale mobiles and installations and studies shamanism.<sup>47</sup> Dixie Straight studied ceramics in college, made a career as an artist in weaving and now works as a bronze welder and finisher for sculptors in Loveland, Colorado.<sup>48</sup> The precise intentionality of the memory jug process discussed in this chapter establishes that the nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jug maker was concerned with the overall aesthetic quality of their finished object. While each of the memory jugs examined display hints of this artistic concern, an artistic hand was clearly at work on Object number four. (Fig. 28)

The small gold memory pitcher (Fig. 28) is housed in a private collection in Memphis, Tennessee and has been assigned an approximate date range of 1949-2008. The chipping of the gold paint around the lip of the vessel indicates that the paint used is spray paint.<sup>49</sup> While the pottery mark on the bottom identifies the small pitcher as being made by an English manufacturer as early as 1842, spray paint was not invented until 1949.<sup>50</sup> External objects were carefully attached to the vessel with an adhesive rather than being inserted into a layer of putty and as a final touch the memory jug was gilded with gold paint. From the underside, the pitcher appears to be cracked which may be why it was transformed into a work of art.

---

47. Fischer, interview by author.

48. Straight, interview by author.

49. Zuckerman, interview by author.

50. Attler, Darrell and Chapnick, "The History of Spray Paint," 43.



Object number was arranged very intentionally to create balance from all perspectives. The surface of the pitcher has been divided in to four faces: front, back, left side and right side. On the left side and right side, duplicate objects and mirrored arrangements are used to create symmetry. This can be observed in the large round knick-knacks, positioned at the center of both sides, each with the same duck and figure scene inside. Just above, the mirrored swoop of a metal chain is duplicated on the left and right side.

Examining the front face of the memory jug (Fig. 29) the arrangement becomes increasingly intricate. Beginning at the top and moving down, dangling beadwork: possibly earrings, loop-headed screws, costume jewelry gems, and wiry springs are mirrored from left to right. Three different objects in this front scene serve as possible focal points given their central location. Starting at the bottom and moving up a large buckle immediately grabs the viewer's attention due to its size and color in relation to surrounding artifacts. In between the two loop-headed screws is an unidentified rectangular object with a Japanesque tree and bird design engraved onto the surface. At the very top, just below the sprout of the pitcher is a Union Artillery cuff button from the Civil War. Each of these potentially meaningful artifacts is emphasized by the arrangement of objects around them. Other objects of interest include numerous seashells, a peach pit, a walnut shell and an intricate border of small beads strung on thread that lines the rim of the pitcher.

While the memory jug maker is a specific type of person, that person is not just an artist. "It is a certain type of artistic person who hunts these things (objects) down and stores them with the idea that they want to do something with that stuff someday," says

Laurie Zuckerman. When doing her first workshop, Zuckerman was concerned about her students having enough objects to cover their jugs but to her surprise, people showed up with more than enough memorabilia to suffice. Each person came prepared with a treasure chest of objects, some stored together in a cigar box and some methodically organized in trays.<sup>51</sup> That being said, the memory jug maker is also a collector, “not a high brow collector, a Junker.”<sup>52</sup> All three contemporary memory jug artists introduced in this chapter consider themselves collectors, and Dixie and Karen come from families of collectors. Laurie Zuckerman shared that she has had an interest in miniatures since she was a young girl. She describes herself as someone who “appreciates the nuances of things.” It doesn’t matter if the stuff is in good shape, bad shape, common, or even broken; Zuckerman appreciates vintage objects for their nostalgia. Karen Fischer says, “I appreciate what others don’t,” and explains that she inherited her collecting habit from her mother. Since childhood she has enjoyed finding fragments of everyday objects with little to no value at all.<sup>53</sup> Dixie Straight considers herself a collector of antiques and jewelry and reveals that her parents are big “Junkers.” Describing them as “Depression-era packrats,” Straight admits that 90-95% of the objects on her jugs come from her parents’ house. Also, many of Straight’s relatives send her family mementos from their own home if they think that she might use it.<sup>54</sup>

Looking back at Objects one, two, three and four, many artifacts are known to be treasured by the everyday, common, collector such as beads, coins, pottery shards, and

---

51. Zuckerman, interview by author.

52. Ibid.

53. Fischer, interview by author.

54. Straight, interview by author.

things found in nature such as walnut shells, seashells and rocks. A few objects are well known among more serious collectors. German Shoulder heads, like the one found on Object number one (Fig. 20) both broken and complete are sought out by competitive collectors today. The Bakelite buckle and arrowhead on Object number three (Fig. 23) as well as the broken Frozen Charlotte dolls on Object number two (Fig. 16) are also popular collector's items in today's antique market. Object number four (Fig. 29) is no exception; aside from the Union artillery cuff button, objects appreciated by common collectors such as buttons, keys, beads and charms adorn the surface of this vessel.

Clearly, memory jugs should not be viewed solely as objects created for the commemoration and remembrance of the deceased. While the objects have maintained characteristic similarities with Congo *minkisi* and African American cultural practices throughout the nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-centuries, memory jugs have acquired new functions and adapted to slightly different forms that are increasingly linked to personal reflection and memory. Drawing from origins in Congo *minkisi*, memory jugs should be treated as equally complex creative forms that deserve an equally complex set of considerations. Only through establishing and practicing these new ways of thinking, looking and interpreting memory jugs can the scholarship move past this embedded hindrance and begin to see productive as well as useful results.

## CONCLUSION

The primary objectives of *Memory Jugs: Continuity and Change in a Traditional American Art Form* is to suggest that African ideas and beliefs manifested in Congo *minkisi* are responsible for the origin of the memory jug and have continued to inform the practice throughout its evolution into the twenty-first-century. This is achieved by strengthening the previously established analogy between memory jugs and African and African American grave decoration and then expanding on existing scholarship to include contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century memory jugs. As a result, my thesis suggests additional ways of viewing and interpreting nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs that deviate from the established methodology that views them strictly as objects created for the commemoration and remembrance of the deceased.

Chapter One and Two offers a dissection of Congo *minkisi* and argues that a strong *minkisi* influence can be observed in African American creative and spiritual practices in the American South. Having established that Congo religious thought manifested in *minkisi* is responsible for the origin of the memory jug practice and its connection to the Congo and African American grave site, the concept of containment is used to strengthen the previously established analogy between the two.

Chapter Three explores the concept of memory as is can be observed in the evolution of the memory jug practice in America. Turning to the specific objects of concern, interviews with three contemporary memory jug artists expand on existing memory jug scholarship and offer a psychoanalytical approach to an in-depth analysis of four nineteenth- to twentieth-century memory jugs. Chapter Three recommends additional ways of interpreting memory jugs that deviate from the established

methodology and by proposing that the memory jug process is intentional, personal, and symbolically complex. The Chapter closes by offering that the memory jug maker is a specific type of person: an artist and a collector. My research suggests that the well known form and function of the memory jug is a modern phenomenon, developed in the African Diaspora during the slave era and into the early twentieth-century. Memory jugs are influenced by African ways of using and thinking about objects that have remained constant throughout the objects' development from early African American material culture to modern artworks conceived as objects of memory.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Eric. "Religion and Freedom: Artifacts indicate that African culture persisted even in slavery." *Omni magazine* 16 no. 2. (Nov 1993):8.
- Anderson, Jeffrey, E. *Conjure in African American Society*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.
- Arnett, William and Paul, eds. *Souls Grown Deep, Vol. 2 African American Vernacular Art of the South*. Atlanta: Tinwood, 2001.
- Attler, Ian and Darrel and Ben Chapnick. "The History of Spray Paint." *Swindle Magazine*. Issue 03. Available from <http://swindlemagazine.com/issue03/>. Accessed 23 July 2009.
- Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Brown, David E. *Inventing Modern America: from the microwave to the mouse*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003.
- Body, Rias. Interview by J.R. Jones, 24 July 1936. Works Project Administration. First Series, Library of Congress Rare Book Room Collection. Georgia Narratives. Vol. 12A, 8. In *American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography* database. Accessed 25 January 2010. Available from [http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn\\_12\\_bod\\_r.pdf](http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn_12_bod_r.pdf).
- Bolton, Henry Carrington. "Decoration of Negro Graves in South Carolina." 4 no. 14 (July-September 1891): 214. Accessed 31 January 2010. Available from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/534005>.
- Campbell, Edward D.C. and Kym S. Rice, ed. *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*. Richmond, Virginia.: Museum of the Confederacy, 1991.
- Davis, Brooke. *Forget Me Not: The Art and Mystery of Memory Jugs*. Winston-Salem: Diggs Gallery, 1996.
- Dennett, R.E. *Seven Years among the Fjort: being an English Trader's Experiences in the Congo District*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1887.
- Fischer, Karen. Interview by author. 24 August 2009. Telephone.

- Glave, E.J. "Fetishism in Congo Land." *The Century; A popular quarterly* 0041 Issue 6 (April 1891):825-837. Accessed 29 January 2010. Available at <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cent;cc=cent;view=toc;subview=short;idno=cent0041-6>.
- Gundaker, Grey. *No Space Hidden: The Spirit of African American Yard Work*, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005.
- Gundaker, Grey. "Tradition and Innovation in African American Yards." *African Arts*. 26 (1993):58-96.
- Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.
- Hildebrand Plantation*. Information obtained from didactic panels at the Pink Palace Museum. Memphis Tennessee. 1 November 2009.
- Ingersoll, Ernest. "Decoration of Negro Graves." *The Journal of American Folklore* 5 no. 16 (Jan-Mar 1982): 68-69.
- Janzen, John M. and Wyatt MacGaffey. *An Anthology of Kongo Religion*. Lawrence, Kans: University of Kansas Press, 1974.
- Jones, Lark. Interview by Anna Pritchett, 1 December 1937. "Hoodoo Doctor." Federal Writer's Project. First Supplemental Series. Indiana Narratives, Vol 05S, 86. In *American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography*. Accessed 25 January 2010. Available from [http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn\\_05s\\_hoo.pdf](http://gem.greenwood.com.ezproxy.memphis.edu/pdf-files/AS/gwsn_05s_hoo.pdf)
- Johnsey, Rose. Owner of Object number one, Interview by author. 2009. Telephone.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt and Michael D. Harris. *Astonishment and Power*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. "Complexity, Astonishment and Power: The Visual Vocabulary of Kongo Minkisi." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14 no. 2 (Jan. 1988): 188-203.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. "Oral Tradition in Central Africa." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7 no. 3. (1974): 417-426.

- MacGaffey, Wyatt. *The Personhood of Ritual Objects; Kongo minkisi*. Amsterdam: Etnofoor, 1990.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Religion and Society in Central Africa: the BaKongo of Lower Zaire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961.
- Mbiti, John S. *Introduction to African Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Heinemann Educational Publishers: Johannesburg, South African, 1991.
- Nickell, Dr. Frank. Professor of History and Director of the Center for Regional History in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Interview by author, 25 July 2009. Telephone.
- Prahlad, Anand, ed. *Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Folklore*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Rozelle, Robert V., Alvia Wardlaw and Maureen A. McKenna, eds. *Black Art Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art*. Dallas, Tex: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989.
- Russell, Charles. *Self Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art*. Jackson, Miss: University of Mississippi Press, 2001.
- Straight, Dixie. Interview by author, 30 August 2009. Telephone.
- The Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum "Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlingar." National Museum of World Culture: 2010. Accessed 12 February 2010. Available from <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/vkm/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi." Internet.
- The Smithsonian American Art Museum. "Search Collections: Memory Decanter with Red Wax and Indian Head Penny,." Accessed 10 December 2009. Available from <http://americanart.si.edu/collection/search/artwork/?id=24940>.
- The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography. "Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlingar." Nationaly Musuem of World Culture: 2010. Accessed 12 February 2010. Available from <http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.SokEnkel>, Lot: "nkisi." Internet.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art, 1993.



- Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1983.
- Thornton, John K. *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition 1641-1718*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- Vlach, John Michael. *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978.
- Wilson, Charles Reagan and William R. Ferris. *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- White, Nancy. Associate Professor of Ceramics at the University of Memphis, Interview by author. 3 November 2009.
- Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007.
- Zuckerman, Laurie. Interview by author, 19 July 2009. Telephone.
- Zuckerman, Laurie. *Memory Jugs: Images, Instructions, Theories*. Fort Collins, Colorado, 2009. Book on C.D.



## ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. *Nkisiriknyte*, before 1919, raffia bag, iron, cord, contents inside unknown, 18 in x 11 ½ in, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Collection, The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, 1919.1.569. *Source*: “Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlingar,” (National Museum of World Culture: 2010), accessed 12 February 2010, available from [http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin\\_Masidn=1212082](http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin_Masidn=1212082),” Internet.



Figure 2. Basundi, *Nkisi Nkukula*, before 1919, clay, skins, plant fiber, 5 ½ in x 6 in, Belgian Congo. Collection, The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, 1919.01.0536. *Source*: “Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlingar,” (National Museum of World Culture: 2010, accessed 12 February 2010, available from [http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin\\_masidn=1187666](http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin_masidn=1187666), Internet.



Figure 3. Basundi, *Nkisi amulet*, before 1919, plant material, shells, before 1919, Belgian Congo, 21 in x 13 ¾ in. Collection, The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, 1919.01.1308. *Source*: “Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlingar,” (National Museum of World Culture: 2010), accessed 12 February 2010, available from, [http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin\\_masidn=1187753](http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin_masidn=1187753), Internet





Figure 4. *Nkisi Nkondi*, late 19<sup>th</sup>- early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wood, iron, imported nails, fiber, beads, glass, feathers, chalk, H. 31 ½ in, Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Source:* Pamela McClusky, *Art From Africa: Long Steps Never Broke a Back*, (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2002), 144, Plate 75.



Figure 5. BaKongo, *Nkisi Nkondi Mungundu*, glass bottle, other materials, before 1907, H. 12 in, Zaire. The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, 1907.26.166. *Source*: Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 77, Figure 54.





Figure 6. BaKongo, *Nkisi* and a detail of the *bilongo* inside, before 1892, wood, glass, shells, stones, pigment, H. 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  in, Africa. Collection, Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 04075. Source: Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 66, Figure 44.





Figure 7. *Detail, inside of an nkisi, before 1919, plant fiber, plant materials, animal parts, feathers, wood, horn, clay, paper, 9 ½ in x 1 ¾ in, Africa. Collection, The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, 1919.01.1154. Source: “Carlotta, Etnografiskamuseet, Databasen för museisamlinger,” (National Museum of World Culture: 2010), accessed 12 February 2010, available from,” [http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin\\_masidn=1218876](http://collections.smvk.se/pls/em/rigby.VisaObjekt?pin_masidn=1218876), Internet.*



Figure 8. BaKongo, *Nkisi Nkubulu*, before 1919, fiber, cloth, beads, other materials, L. 9 ¾ in, Zaire. Collection, The Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, 19.1162. *Source*: Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 63, Figure 43.





Figure 9. *Bottle Tree*, Arlington, TN, 2010. *Source:* Jennifer Hornby, author.



Figure 10. *The Cornelius Lee Yard Show*, Tidewater, Virginia, 1988. Source: Robert V. Rozelle, Alvia Wardlaw and Maureen A. McKenna, eds, *Black Art Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art*, (Dallas, Tex: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989), 131, Figure 32.





Figure 11. Reverend George Kornegay, *Reverend George Kornegay's Yard*, 1997-1998, Bibb County, Alabama. Source: William Arnett and Paul Arnett, *Souls Grown Deep, African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume Two* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001), 174.



Figure 12. *Yard Show*, Austin, Texas, early 1990's. *Source*: Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*, ( New York: Museum for African Art, 1993), 86, Plate 70.



Figure 13. E. J. Glaves, *A Congo Cheiftan's Grave*, before 1891, Congo. Source: E.J. Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," *The Century: A popular quarterly*, 0041 Issue 6 (April 1891): 827, accessed 8 January 2010, available at <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/textidx?c=cent;cc=cent;view=toc;subview=short;idno=cent0041-6>.



Figure 14. Doris Ullman, *Grave Decoration in an African American Cemetery*, 1933, Sea Islands, Georgia. *Source*: John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 140.





Figure 15. *Grave Decoration in an African American Cemetery*, 2009, Reverend W. H. Hammond Cemetery, Arlington, TN. *Source*: Reprinted, by permission, from Michael Darough.



Figure 16. Artist unknown, *Object number two*, date unknown, H. 8 ½ in, Jackson, Tennessee. Private Collection. *Source*: Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.



Figure 17. Artist Unknown, *Memory Decanter with Red Wax and Indian Head Penny*, after 1904. Collection, The Smithsonian American Art Museum, *Source*: “Search Collections: Memory Decanter with Red Wax and Indian Head Penny,” available from <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=24940>, accessed 10 December 2009.





Figure 18. Artist unknown, *Memory jug with stopper*, Private Collection. Source: Laurie Zuckerman, *Memory Jugs: Images, Instructions, Theories*, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2009, book on C.D., page 95.



Figure19. Karen Fischer, *Overland Trail Jug*, 2006. Source: Laurie Beth Zuckerman: Iconarte, "Laurie Fischer's Memory Jug," accessed 8 January, 2010, available at <http://lauriezuckerman.blogspot.com/2007/01/karens-finished-memory-jug.html>.



Figure 20. Artist unknown, *Object number one*, before 1989, H. 9 ½ in, Jackson, Tennessee. Private Collection, *Source*: Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.





Figure 21. Karen Fischer, *Overland Trail Jug Preliminary Layout*. Example of the process used and taught by Laurie Zuckerman. Source: Laurie Zuckerman, *Memory Jugs: Images, Instructions, Theories*, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2009, book on c.d., 26.



Figure 22. Detail of *Object number 2*, broken Frozen Charlotte doll with round object positioned where the missing head would otherwise be, two views. *Source:* Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.





Figure 23. Artist Unknown, *Object number 3*, 1923-1989, H.11 in, Cape Girardeau, Missouri, four views, Private Collection. *Source:* Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.



Figure 24. Detail of *Object number three*, Cape Girardeau Graduating Class Pin and Bakelite buckle. *Source:* Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.

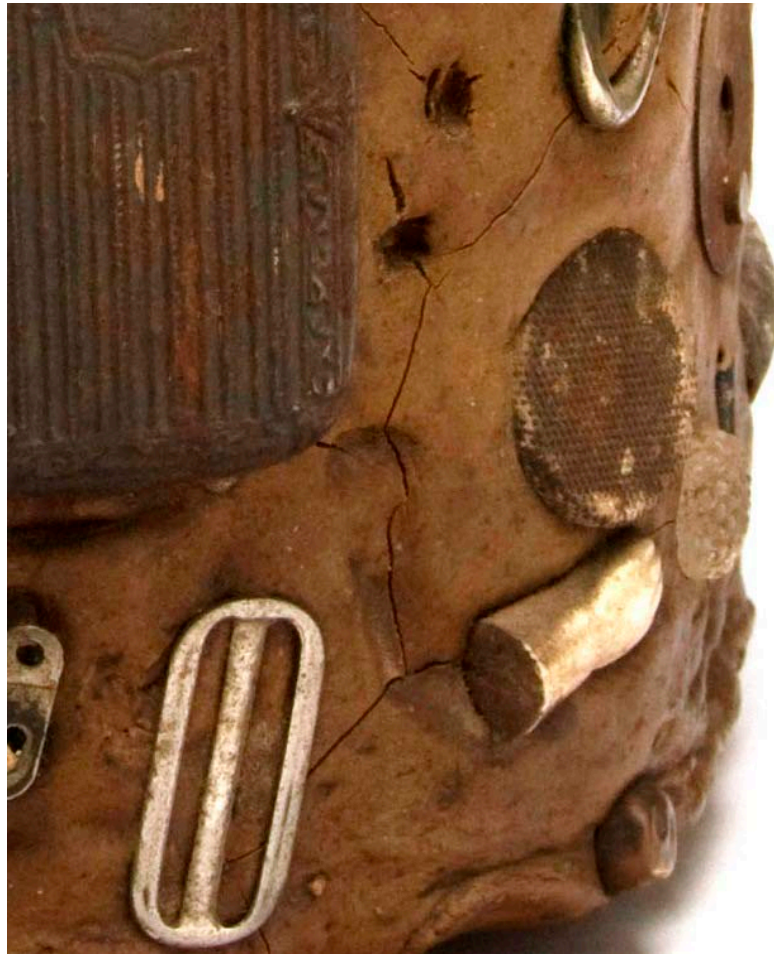


Figure 25. Detail of *Object number three*, broken doll hand, repositioned. *Source:* Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.





Figure 26. Detail of *Object number three*, two spiral imprints side-by-side, one with a black bead positioned on top. Below is the circular object, likely a button, used to make these imprints. *Source:* Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.



Figure 27. *Memory jug*, Dixie Strait, 2009. *Source:* Laurie Beth Zuckerman: ICONARTE, accessed 28 September 2009, available at <http://lauriezuckerman.blogspot.com/2007/01/dixies-finished-jug.html>.



Figure 28. Artist unknown, *Object number four*, 1949-2008, H. 6 in., four views, Private Collection. *Source:* Courtesy of David Horan, 2009.





Figure 29. Artist unknown, Detail of *Object number four*, front, 1949-2008. Source: Jennifer Hornby, author.